RALPH *on the* ARMY TRAIN

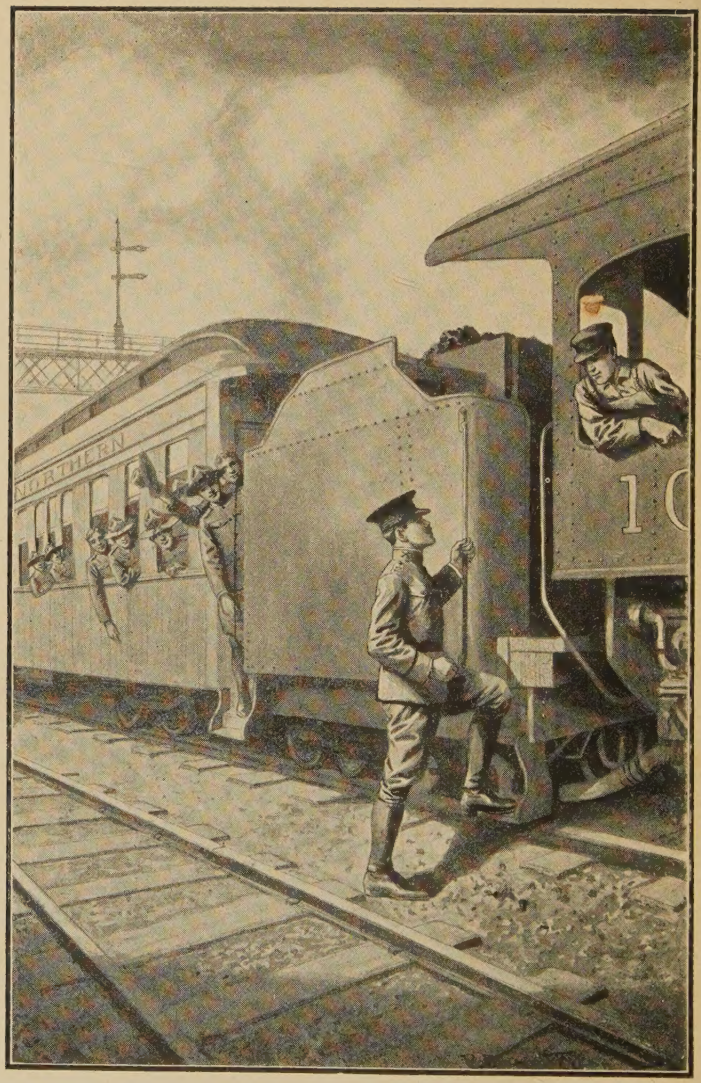
BY ALLEN CHAPMAN

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_W9-CBN-929

Jansen & Co. Printers
Le Roy.

40
12
16
68
74 95
340
612
6466



AN OFFICER STEPPED ABOARD THE LOCOMOTIVE.

RALPH ON THE ARMY TRAIN

OR

THE YOUNG RAILROADER'S MOST DARING EXPLOIT

BY

ALLEN CHAPMAN

AUTHOR OF "RALPH OF THE ROUNDHOUSE," "RALPH IN THE SWITCH TOWER," "RALPH ON THE ENGINE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

THE RAILROAD SERIES
By Allen Chapman

RALPH OF THE ROUNDHOUSE
Or, Bound to Become a Railroad Man
RALPH IN THE SWITCH TOWER
Or, Clearing the Track
RALPH ON THE ENGINE
Or, The Young Fireman of the Limited Mail
RALPH ON THE OVERLAND EXPRESS
Or, The Trials and Triumphs of a Young Engineer
RALPH, THE TRAIN DISPATCHER
Or, The Mystery of the Pay Car
RALPH ON THE ARMY TRAIN
Or, The Young Railroader's Most Daring Exploit

GROSSET & DUNLAP, Publishers, New York

COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY
GROSSET & DUNLAP

Ralph on the Army Train.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The New Locomotive	1
II.	The Torpedo	11
III.	Studying It Out	17
IV.	A Bucket of Paste	27
V.	Otto	32
VI.	The Troop Train Order	37
VII.	The Hour Approaches	44
VIII.	Pelly Reports	56
IX.	What the Message Meant	64
X.	On Impulse	74
XI.	Taking No Chance	89
XII.	Dark Ways	101
XIII.	Jumping In	106
XIV.	The Track Gang	114
XV.	Blown Up	121
XVI.	The Work Train	129
XVII.	A Runaway	138
XVIII.	Chased	145
XIX.	The Trail of the Traitors	153
XX.	Evidence	165
XXI.	The Tangle	178
XXII.	"They'll Never Get Through"	184
XXIII.	New Suspicions	191

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIV.	At the Pullman Window	201
XXV.	Deadly Peril	210
XXVI.	Quick Eye—Ready Brain!	216
XXVII.	He Is Gone!	224
XXVIII.	What King Canute Said	231
XXIX.	It Comes to a Head	242
XXX.	On the Army Train	251
XXXI.	Interference	260
XXXII.	A Desperate Encounter—Conclusion	269

RALPH ON THE ARMY TRAIN

CHAPTER I

THE NEW LOCOMOTIVE

"HERE she comes, boys!"

"Just take a look at that baby, Ike! Isn't she a hummer?"

"Eight drivers! Oh, boy! What can she do to those grades 'twixt here and Shelby Junction?"

"Eat 'em up! My, my! never was such an old mill on this road before."

The admiring ejaculations from the group of roundhouse employees that had come up to the station to see the Western Express, pulled by the mighty new leviathan of a locomotive just put into service by the Great Northern, draw in, became a chorus of awed wonder as the huge machine panted to a halt.

Railroad employees from all over the Stanley Junction yards hurried to the head of the train

to look the monster over. Among them was an active young fellow who shot across the tracks and swung himself aboard the new locomotive.

"Hullo, Jenks! How's the girl?" he said to the grinning engineer. "What do you think of her?"

"She's great, Mr. Fairbanks," the man replied, in almost an awed whisper.

"Pretty nifty proposition, eh?" and the young fellow laughed as his eyes swept the shining mechanism in the cab.

"Say! I ain't dared try to get speed out of her," declared Jenks, hoarsely. "I'm afraid of shortening the schedule too much."

"All right, old Eagle-eye. You play it safe. I'd be tickled to death to take this Thousand-and-One out for a run myself."

"Ah, Mr. Fairbanks," said the engineer, "that's what I tell 'em all. Once a driver, always a driver. Your fingers'll always itch for the feel of the throttle and the Johnson bar."

Ralph Fairbanks laughed as he leaped down to the platform again and started away from the Great Northern's newest and fastest locomotive, waving his hand to the engineer and his fireman. One of the loitering bystanders joined the youth as he started up the path leading to the train dispatcher's office.

"What do you think of it, Mr. Fairbanks?" he asked. "Ain't she a hummer?"

"She sure is. We've got—— Hullo! What's the matter here?"

There were half a dozen men in a group just in front of them. Out of that group came the sound of an angry voice, which said:

"Vell de vorst I vish 'em is shplidt rail ven dey run dose troop trains t'roo mit her. That's de worst *I* vish 'em."

"You're crazy in the head, Jake! What good would it do that Keezer of yourn and that Von Hindenburg, or whatever the guy's name is, to ditch just one trainload of doughboys? The others'll git 'em just the same."

"Ach! You talk mit a foolishness—not me!" gutturally declared the first speaker, and more excitedly. "A hunderd t'ousand—*Nein!*—a hunderd million of Yankee soldiers won't nefer stop de Kaiser. De Germans can lick de vor-r-rdlt yet."

"Sure! Lick their boots, Jake," sneered the other.

The heavy face of the man, Jacob, was mottled with anger; his thick chest puffed out like a bellows; his little gray-green eyes snapped.

"You fellers will see yet!" he growled. "Dere'll be trains wrecked. Dere'll be ships sunk.

Dere'll be munitions yet blowed up. Dere'll be grain elevators fired. Herds of hosses undt mules vill die mit diseases. Fields of wheat vill be destroydt. You vait——"

"We won't wait for much more of such talk from you!" put in Ralph Fairbanks, his eyes aflame, pushing his way into the midst of the group of railroad employees.

"You know enough English to read the signs that are tacked up all about. 'Obey the law, and keep your mouth shut.' And you other fellows had better keep off the war, too."

"All right, Mr. Fairbanks," said one of the wipers. "We were just having a bit of fun with Jacob."

"It's not fun for him——"

"No!" broke in the heavy-faced man, anger still glowing in his eyes. "Undt it von't alwus be fun for you Yankee pigs!"

"Say!" ejaculated two or three of the crowd, with sudden anger. But Ralph Fairbanks put up an admonishing hand.

"Hard words break no bones," he observed. "Say, Jake, if you are so fond of the Kaiser and all his works, why did you ever leave Germany? Why didn't you stay over there and live on black bread and horse-sausage, and learn to goose-step and cross your eyes over the bridge of your nose

every time you saw an officer? This country doesn't seem to suit you, and a lot like you."

"I come here because I want to," growled the German. "Undt I dond't haf to ask you, yet, can I shtay."

"That's right," returned Ralph, laughing shortly. "And perhaps that's the trouble with a whole lot like you. You get in here too easy, and your being allowed to remain doesn't rest on your good behavior, as it should.

"The best thing that could happen to you Germans who haven't the decency and sense of gratitude to make you loyal to the United States, would be to load up ships with you, instead of sending so many troops, and send you across to your blessed *'Vaterland.'* If the U-boats sunk a few of you, all the better."

"Hooray! Bully!" exclaimed two or three of the roundhouse employees; but there were lowering faces and shaken heads, too, as the young man walked on. There were other Germans, as well as Austrians, working for the Great Northern, and in all departments of the railroad.

The man who slouched along by Ralph Fairbanks' side was a raw-boned, unwieldy-looking fellow who would have been more than six feet tall if he had straightened up and squared his shoulders. He chewed a straw.

"What's that fellow's name, Pelly?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, Jake? His last name's Mund."

"'Mund'? That's it, is it?" and Ralph chuckled. "That's what's the matter with him and some others around here. He's too much *'mund.'*"

"Eh?" The ungainly Pelly stared at Ralph, puzzled.

"*'Mund'* means 'mouth.' That's Jake's trouble. He's got too much mouth. We'd better all take the warning of the Attorney General to heart, and talk less on war matters. There are a lot of foreign-born men about here—lots working for the railroad."

"Why should we keep our mouths shut?" demanded Pelly. "We're Americans, and we're patriotic."

"Sure. And some of the German and Austrian-born men are good American citizens, too. We don't want to antagonize them and hurt their feelings. Their sons are going into our army and navy."

"That's all right," growled Pelly, sheering off as Ralph came to the stairway leading up to the train dispatchers' office. "But they ain't all loyal. Make up your mind, Mr. Fairbanks; there are a lot of 'em like Jake Mund around here, only they

keep quiet. But they'd work in underhand ways."

It was at the hour of eight in the morning that this incident occurred, and Ralph Fairbanks mounted the narrow stairway to the second floor, where the telegraph and dispatchers' tables stood. He nodded to John Glidden, who was the manager of the division, and to the several other men working on this trick, and at once approached the door of the small office marked "Chief Dispatcher."

The room he entered was not a fancy sanctum, for the furniture was old and the outlook upon the "cliffs" just across the narrow strip of railroad yard was not beautiful. But it meant a great deal to Ralph Fairbanks, for he was boss of it. He was the chief dispatcher on this division of the G. N., and the youngest man holding that position on the entire system.

How he had worked up to this eminence, and that in a few short years, is in truth several stories. The first of these is entitled "Ralph of the Roundhouse," and narrates his beginnings on the road. Ralph's father was one of the builders of the Great Northern but, in dying, left his widow and son in the toils of a villainous partner, Gaspar Farrington. How Ralph checkmates Farrington and makes good in the lower ranks of railroading fills the first volume of this series.

"Ralph in the Switch Tower" gives a clear account of the work of the block signal switchmen; and Ralph's conscientious labors therein gain him the chance he has been looking for. He became a "tallowpot," otherwise fireman, and his experiences when firing on a Great Northern locomotive are told in the third volume of the series, "Ralph on the Engine."

"Ralph on the Overland Express" details the young fellow's next step-up and shows him at the throttle of the locomotive drawing the top-notch train of the Great Northern, a position that might have satisfied any young man.

But Ralph was a born railroad man. He wanted to know it all. He was constantly studying and learning from others. In addition, circumstances placed him in a position where he could perform certain acts for the good of the Great Northern railroad which could not be overlooked.

He made a friend of the general superintendent, even of the president of the Great Northern. He showed a particular aptitude for work of a higher grade than that of engineer; although there is scarcely any work about a railroad more important than the duties of "the eagle-eye." When Ralph left the right-hand bench of the cab to draft his first schedule in the dispatcher's office,

he did not leave his love of the throbbing locomotive behind him.

But this was an advance with the company, and Ralph could not, for his own and his mother's sake, refuse it. He became a train dispatcher, and within a brief period was made chief dispatcher of this division. Now, as he slid into the battered chair behind his desk and gave his attention to the reports of the two previous tricks, the thrill of his important position was still with him.

He had won something besides advancement during his railroad experience. He had hosts of friends. Even John Glidden, who had grown gray in the service, made no complaint when Ralph Fairbanks was jumped to his present situation.

Of late the young dispatcher's mind had not been entirely free from extraordinary care, though, of course, Ralph Fairbanks' duties were always onerous and his mind was usually fixed on the grave necessities of his office.

But since the United States had declared that a state of war existed with the Imperial German Government not only had national affairs become perilous, but local incidents pointed to possible trouble for the Great Northern.

Stanley Junction was exceedingly patriotic as a town, but there were a few I. W. W.'s and

pro-Germans, as well as actual Germans like Jacob Mund, who were able to stir up a deal of clamor; and this threatened to make trouble for authorities.

The incident that had just taken place rankled in Ralph Fairbanks' thoughts. Despite the concentration necessary for his work, in the back of his mind was this other matter of danger to the Republic—particularly danger connected with the Great Northern's immediate dispatch of certain troop trains expected any night now.

The military authorities were keeping the actual time of movements of troops as much of a secret as possible. But when so many people know of such a thing, the approximate date would not be hard to determine.

Ralph raised his eyes from his work and thought of this fact. His gaze strayed to the window before him. The lower sash was raised to its full height.

Unexpectedly something slithered into the open window and crashed against the corner of the desk—something half the size of Ralph's fist—that hopped noisily across the floor and finally lay still in one corner of the room.

CHAPTER II

THE TORPEDO

JUST as the thing that had entered the window and struck Ralph's desk ceased rolling, Glidden opened the door to ask a question. Ralph was half out of his chair, staring wide-eyed at the missile.

"What struck you?" Glidden asked in surprise.

"It struck my desk, not me," said Ralph.

"That thing?"

Glidden stepped in and picked up the object.

"Where'd it come from?" he asked.

"Ask me an easier one," Ralph replied with a shrug. "Except that it came in at the window, I couldn't guess. If it had hit me——"

"Shucks! it's only a twist of paper. Hullo, it's loaded!" Glidden added, in amazement.

"It hit my desk like a brick."

"Why, boy!" exclaimed Glidden, with increasing astonishment and excitement, "it's one of those giant torpedoes, isn't it?"

"If there's a percussion cap in it, it would have

exploded when it landed on my desk," Ralph declared.

The puzzled manager put the thing down gingerly. It did look to be merely a twist of paper, several thicknesses of strong paper. It was shaped like a torpedo, but much larger than any paper torpedo Ralph had ever seen. The crumpled and twisted ends of the paper which held the thing in shape and kept its contents from spilling, were fastened with glue.

"Cracky!" gasped Ralph, taking a long breath. "It came as swiftly as though it had been thrown by a gun."

"Harder than a man could throw it?"

"Bet you!" Ralph drew out his knife and gingerly cut the top off the torpedo-shaped object. "Don't want it to blow us up," he added.

Glidden grinned. "I've got my fingers crossed," he said lightly. "I think somebody is playing a joke on you, Fairbanks."

"I hope so," returned Ralph seriously. "But my nerves are on the jump I must confess."

"Shucks! these pro-Germans and wild anarchists are nothing but gas-bags."

"Perhaps. But it is poison gas they throw," returned Ralph, at that moment pulling apart the small receptacle the twist of papers had made.

"It was loaded all right!" ejaculated Glidden,

seeing what Ralph first rattled out upon the top of his desk.

These were several new, shiny burrs belonging to small bolts—stove bolts, perhaps. They had given the paper receptacle sufficient weight to make it a missile that could be thrown accurately.

"But say!" ejaculated Glidden, peering, "where's the cap?"

Ralph spread out the several thicknesses of paper with a puzzled frown.

"Don't see anything like that. Hold on!" he muttered, "what's this?"

He removed the inner sheet of crumpled paper. It was about five inches square. There were several lines faintly traced in ink on the face of the scrap of paper.

"More mystery! Whew!" whistled Glidden. "Looks bad, Ralph. Does she send you billets-doux in this fashion?"

"If she does," grumbled Ralph, "she took the risk of cracking my head with this one. I tell you it was shot into the window with force enough to dent the desk."

"I say, she's German!" gasped Glidden, thoroughly interested now. "See that line, boy?"

Ralph spread the scrap of paper carefully on the desk. The two bent over it and together read the following screed:

"To-night's the night!

"The Owl Car.

"What Canute said to the tide, we say to the U. S. Gov. and the G. N.'s troop trains.

"Mit Gott für Konig und Vaterland!"

"Well, for the love of Pete!" gasped Glidden, "what foolishness is this?"

"Doesn't read just like a love-letter, as you suggested," Ralph rejoined grimly.

"Foolishness!"

"A joke, do you think?" suggested the young chief dispatcher incredulously. "But why play it on me?"

"Because you are just the one to be worried by it," the man said very sensibly. "You are chief dispatcher. The burden is on you to get those troop trains through when they do come——"

"And they are coming!" exclaimed Ralph.

"But we don't know when," returned Glidden shortly.

Ralph's forefinger pointed to the first line written upon the scrap of paper.

"'To-night's the night,'" he murmured.

"Shucks! it is a joke I tell you," said the man, somewhat nervously.

"I wish I was sure of that," grumbled Ralph

Fairbanks. "I feel more like calling up Mr. Bob Adair and telling him."

Bob Adair was the railroad's chief detective, and to Ralph Fairbanks' mind he was a wonderful sleuth. Ralph had worked with him on more than one occasion, for the young fellow had himself shown some proficiency in criminal investigation.

As an instance, in the volume of this series immediately preceding the present story, Ralph had cleared up the mystery of a lost pay-car and a missing twenty thousand dollars. Mr. Adair had praised him much for that success.

Glidden heard Adair's name mentioned with a shake of his head.

"Better not stir up a mare's nest—not at this time," he advised. "Adair has got his hands full as it is. The guards along the length of the division have been doubled, I understand. There are plain-clothes men working in every town. Oh, the road is doing its share, Ralph, and Adair is missing no tricks."

"He's missed this," grumbled Ralph, nodding at the mysterious message on the desk.

Glidden chuckled as he turned to leave the room. "Better call in your friend, Zeph Dallas. This thing would be nuts for him."

Zeph Dallas was a man who had first crossed

Ralph Fairbanks' path when Dallas was fresh from a backwoods settlement, where he had become inspired with a desire to be a "real, sure-enough detective," and the laughable misadventures Zeph had at first got into because of this "bug" amused Ralph on more than one occasion.

Of late, however, Zeph seemed to have developed considerable good sense, and in the pay-car mystery mentioned above, he had been of positive aid to Ralph in bringing the matter to a successful conclusion. Glidden's suggestion as he left the office, therefore, did not sound entirely like a joke to Ralph.

The chief dispatcher sat down to his desk once more and drew the telephone thoughtfully toward him. After a moment he took down the receiver and spoke a number into the transmitter. It was the call-number of the office in which Zeph Dallas had recently gone to work.

CHAPTER III

STUDYING IT OUT

GLIDDEN, it seemed to the chief dispatcher, considered the strange message that had been flung into the window of less importance than it deserved. Ralph could not accept the easy explanation that it was a jest.

While he waited for Zeph Dallas to come over to the dispatchers' offices, Ralph studied the several lines of writing on the scrap of paper which had been wrapped in the "torpedo." First of all, the character of the writing itself was worthy of scrutiny.

Ralph had seen German script; and the handwriting of most Germans whose letters he had seen resembled that of this missive. Besides, the diction of the strange letter was about as a German would put it. He could not believe it a joke.

The last line was written in German. He knew that it was a familiar quotation. It was a line engraved upon many German steel helmets, par-

ticularly the dress helmets of the Potsdam Guard.

"With God for King and Fatherland."

That expression, so inspiring to the Prussian mind, was used in this case as a signature to the letter, and stamped it, Ralph Fairbanks believed, as being of serious intent. Besides, why should anybody, for a joke, send him such a remarkable message?

Of course, a person quite sane, if connected with a conspiracy to foil the railroad's attempt to get troop trains safely through, would not send such a warning.

Did a mad mind inspire the message and the method of delivering it to the chief dispatcher of this division of the G. N.? It was a hint of coming trouble, and the sender believed the trouble could not be averted.

"To-night's the night." That could mean but one thing—the time settled on by the military authorities to send the first troop train through. But Fairbanks had not heard officially that it was to go through at this time.

"If it is——" he muttered, running his fingers through his thick hair as he bent over his desk, on which lay the strange message, "if it is going

through to-night, then this fellow, whoever he is, knows more than I do about it."

Again Ralph's hand reached for the telephone. He got the connection with the superintendent's office in a few moments. But it took several more to get the man himself on the wire.

"Fairbanks?" asked the general superintendent crisply.

"Yes, sir. Have you heard yet about those troop trains? When they will go through?"

"No. Nobody on the road knows yet. You will be informed in season to rip your schedule to pieces," and the superintendent finished with a low laugh. "Are you staying on the job?"

"Two tricks in the twenty-four hours," replied Ralph, and hung up the receiver.

He shook his head, staring again at the paper. Suppose it should be to-night? Ought he to take the superintendent into his confidence?

"If it turns out that this is a straight tip about the time," Ralph ruminated, "these fellows have got ahead of us. There is a leak before the news reaches the general superintendent's office, that is sure."

He gave thought to what followed on the written paper. "The Owl Car." That meant nothing at all to him, not at first. Did it mean "the owl train"? Many railroads have trains around

midnight called locally "the owl train." But there was none thus known on this division.

"The Owl Car." All Ralph Fairbanks could think of that could be called that was the car over the interurban line, an electric surface car, that left City Square at five minutes past one in the morning, and ran to the suburb in which his mother and he lived. He often rode in that car himself when he was delayed until a late hour at the offices.

"But what's the interurban line got to do with the transportation of these troops?" he asked himself, shrugging his shoulders. "That gets me."

Going on to what really seemed to be the most important phrase in this puzzling message, he repeated over again, and aloud:

"'What Canute said to the tide, we say to the United States Government and the Great Northern's troop trains.' Say, what did old Canute say to the sea?"

Every schoolboy has read the story, and it returned clearly to Ralph Fairbanks' memory at this juncture. To prove to his courtiers that he had no supernatural power, King Canute had his seat placed below high water mark. There he sat himself down and forbade the tide to rise past his feet.

"Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!" was something like the command he gave. And these people—pro-Germans, traitors, anarchists, whatever they were—proposed to give the same command relative to the troop trains. "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther!"

What did the rigmarole mean? After all, he was inclined to believe John Glidden was right—it was a joke. At least, there was no sense to it. A hare-brained person must have been the author of the message.

And where had it come from? How was it thrown into the window? He got up to walk to the casement and look down into the narrow yard and the street beyond, just as the door was flung open and Zeph Dallas burst in.

"What's doing?" demanded Zeph, with his usual impetuosity. "Why didn't you tell me over the 'phone? Got me all keyed up. Hullo!" and he pounced on the scraps of paper and the burrs on the desk. "What's this?"

Ralph, standing at the window, told him briefly, Zeph's excitement and interest growing the while.

"My goodness! My goodness!" gasped the younger fellow, his eyes glowing and his lips twitching with nervous excitement as he listened. "Have you told Mr. Bob Adair?"

"Why, Zeph, I haven't told anybody but you," Ralph said. "John Glidden doesn't believe it's anything but a joke."

"Nope! No joke!" Zeph declared with earnestness.

"Are you positive?"

"Sure! No joke!" repeated Zeph. "Germans aren't joking much just now. And a German wrote that message, Ralph."

"Yes. I believe you are right. It's written by a hand used to German script and not to English," Ralph said, ruminatingly. "But how are we going to find——"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Zeph, holding up a hand to stop his friend. "Let's take things in order. First, how did the message get to you?"

"Why, I told you. It was twisted up like a torpedo and flung in here. You can see the glue on the corners of the several pieces of paper. There are the burrs that weighted the torpedo. If it had hit me it would have hurt."

"Humph! Where did it hit?" Zeph asked thoughtfully.

Ralph showed him the spot on the side of the desk. The missile had hit with such force that it had made a slight dent.

Zeph began to look from the mark on the desk to the window. He went to the latter and stared

out. But Ralph noticed that he did not look down into the railroad yard or into the street at all.

"It was coming some, I guess?" muttered the amateur detective, inquiringly.

"You said it," admitted the chief dispatcher, watching his friend curiously. "If it had been shot out of a gun——"

"Was. Kind of a gun. One of the oldest guns made," said Zeph, chuckling.

"What do you mean?"

"See here," and Zeph beckoned him to the window. "Where do you reckon the fellow stood that threw the thing into the window?"

"Give it up. Down there in the yard or in the street."

"Think again, Ralph," urged Zeph eagerly, his eyes snapping. "If it had been tossed up from down there it would have struck your desk with no particular force."

"What?" cried Ralph.

"Don't you see? All the force would have been expended in tossing the thing high enough to come through this window. The missile's course would have curved before entering. It would have landed lightly. Don't you see?"

"Why, Zeph——"

"Wait! If it had been flung hard enough from below to enter this office swiftly, it would have

passed above the desk—perhaps hit the wall high up, or even the ceiling."

"You're right," declared Ralph, with satisfaction. "Zeph! you've got the thing right. Why——"

"Now, see!" urged the excited young fellow. "That proves conclusively, as Mr. Adair would say, that the arc of the curve of the missile shows it was not thrown from below."

"Wow, wow!" laughed Ralph, "listen to the professor." But the next moment he was serious. "Go on, Zeph. You are doping it out right."

"So you see, the thing must have been thrown, or shot, from a level near that of this window-sill, or from above."

Ralph was peering out again. "But, Zeph, there isn't any place across there but the cliffs. The back yards of the houses on High Street——"

"The yards are lower than the window," Zeph said quickly.

They were both looking up at the windows of a row of two-storied brick tenement houses which surmounted the cliffs, their backs to the railroad yard and lower street, and their front windows overlooking one of the town's principal business streets.

"What's up there, anyway?" asked Ralph doubtfully.

"It might easily come from there. Some Germans live in that block, as well as other foreigners. There's a saloon on the corner, a delicatessen shop half-way in the block—— Say, there's Schwartzchild's!"

"What's that?"

"The hardware store. And those new burrs could easily be picked up there."

"Know which house the shop is in?" asked Ralph.

"Not from here. But, say!" cried Zeph, with further excitement, "there's another shop those burrs might have come from. There's a stove and lamp store in the row, too. A feller named Blum runs it."

"Might be German, too," muttered Ralph.

"There's a whole row of suspects," Zeph went on seriously. "The burrs are good evidence, if we can get something else to corroborate it. Say, the glue!"

"What about it?"

"That would be found in the hardware store, but not so likely in the stove store," Zeph declared. "It's regular carpenter's glue, that you have to boil up to use. It's no prepared stuff that you get in a bottle."

"Good boy! Your deductions are right to the point. Which windows in sight belong to which store?"

"Don't know," Zeph said briskly. "Let's go around there and take a look at the store fronts."

"In a minute. It is most lunch time anyway. I'll see how things are going with the schedule. Hold on, Zeph! Here's another question: How was that thing thrown in here, even from one of those windows, with such force?"

"Oh, I caught on to that in the first place. It did come with some force to hit your desk such a crack, eh?"

"You've said it!"

"It was thrown by no human arm, then," Zeph declared confidently. "It was shot from a gun all right."

"A gun?" repeated Ralph Fairbanks. "What kind of a gun?"

"Catapult," announced Zeph. "You know. Like we kids used to make. A sling of leather, a good piece of indiarubber, and a forked stick. Good old slingshot—and the oldest form of gun in existence."

CHAPTER IV

A BUCKET OF PASTE

Ralph Fairbanks was inclined to give his friend credit for having hit upon the method by which the "torpedo" had been cast into the window of the office. He agreed, too, with Zeph's suggestion that they keep away from that particular window.

"Whoever the guy was that did the trick," Zeph Dallas said, "he is probably on the watch over there to see how you take it, whether you give it any particular notice. We've been at this window long enough."

Zeph was flushed and excited. This was the kind of mystery that gripped him every time. He did not want his friend to take Mr. Bob Adair into his confidence, for he believed he could get to the bottom of the matter himself.

It was a five-minute brisk walk to the foot of High Street; and then it occupied some time for the two friends to climb the hill to the long block in which was Schwartzchild's hardware

store. As Zeph had said, there were more German names than that on the signs along the block.

"There's a German bakery," Ralph Fairbanks said. "But that's not far enough along for that torpedo to have been thrown from the bakery's back window."

"That cobbler there is a German, isn't he?" asked Zeph, pointing out another small shop.

They glanced into the window of the cobbler's shop as they passed and saw a little, hoop-shouldered, bald-headed man tapping away with his hammer on the sole of a boot.

"He doesn't look as if he'd be mixed up in any conspiracy against either the Government or the railroad," muttered Ralph.

"And he couldn't have chucked that torpedo in at your window," chuckled Zeph.

"I suppose there are lots of German and Austrian families living over these stores, too," Ralph suggested. "It might have been thrown from somebody's kitchen window on the second or third floor."

"Say," Zeph said in half a minute, "there's the stove store. 'A. Blum.' See? Over the door."

"I see it. There's a door for the upstairs tenants between it and the hardware shop, Schwartzchild's place."

"Yep. Those stores are just about opposite your window, as I thought."

"Humph!" grunted the young dispatcher. "But look! The apartments upstairs are empty, both of them. They are being painted and papered."

"Well, we'll see. See that lanky fellow standing in Schwartzchild's doorway? That's Freddy Holtz. He's Schwartzchild's nephew, and he's been blowing about how he's going to beat the draft. He's more than twenty-one—and he's a regular Hun."

"Hush!" commanded Ralph. "No use in stirring up trouble here. I suppose he might have thrown that torpedo. But if he's the sort of fellow you say he is, why should he have written that warning?"

"Humph!"

"Nothing but a fellow with a soft head would have written that kind of a letter—unless it was written just for a joke."

"Freddy wouldn't joke," admitted Zeph. "To hear him talk he's really in earnest in what he says."

Both young fellows were scrutinizing the fronts of the two brick structures, the street floors of which were occupied by the stores in question. They were dingy stores, and the buildings needed

redecorating on the outside as much as they did within.

The hall and stairway between the two stores were cluttered with torn wall paper, stepladders, planks, and other litter belonging to the paperhangers and painters.

A short, stocky man in bespattered overalls, and of a pronounced German cast of countenance, approached briskly and entered the hall door. In a high, sharp voice he shouted some command up the stairway in German.

"Ja, ja!" replied somebody above. "I'm coming yet."

The stairway was half blocked by a plank laid from an upper step to the top tread of the stepladder standing in the lower hall. Ralph and Zeph, halting before the doorway, beheld the descending feet and ankles of the workman who had replied to the sharp hail of the boss.

"Hurry up down mit that paste, Otto!" shouted the latter, stepping further into the hall.

"Ja, ja!" said the other voice, and now the bottom of the paste pail came into view.

Ralph and Zeph, still curious, remained looking in at the doorway. The crowded stairway was not easily descended by the person with the bucket of paste, and suddenly Zeph grabbed his friend by the arm.

"Oh, look there!" he whispered. "Cracky!"

The right toe of the unknown caught against the end of the plank. The latter must have been precariously balanced upon the stepladder, for it crashed outward through the doorway and the plank slammed down with it.

There was a yell from above, and the fellow with the bucket of paste pitched down the stairway. As though it had been hurled deliberately at the head of the German boss in the hall, the contents of the bucket splattered all over him.

Sprawling like a frog diving from a high bank, the fellow with the bucket followed the shower of paste, plunging head-first into the sturdy German boss. The latter's mouth was filled with paste as he crashed backward to the floor, his unfortunate underling on top.

Zeph Dallas was too excited even to laugh at the catastrophe. Into Ralph's ear he gasped this astonishing information:

"Look at him! I know that fellow, Fairbanks. He tried only last week to get a job on a section gang of the G. N. He's a Heinie who can scarcely talk a word of English."

CHAPTER V

OTTO

THE few passersby who joined Ralph and Zeph at the open doorway of the tenement house on High Street were so broadly amused that nobody was likely to note the seriousness with which the two young railroaders contemplated the results of the accident.

The group did, indeed, shriek with laughter, and its gibes and jokes almost drowned the sputterings of the German paperhanger, whom Otto had overwhelmed with the bucket of paste.

Plainly the paperhanger's assistant stood in great awe of his master. Dropping the empty paste bucket he made wildly for the street door.

But the man grabbed him by the ankle as he passed, and Otto was brought to the floor.

A rapid-fire exchange of German expletives followed, and it was evident that Otto was not to be allowed to escape punishment for his awkward act.

The paperhanger struggled up, holding to his pleading prisoner with powerful grasp. Zeph

Dallas began to urge Ralph away from the spot.

"Come on," he said. "What's the use of staying here to see that poor chump get pounded?"

"I'm not going to see him pounded by that big Heinie," growled Ralph, refusing to move.

"Aw, now, Fairbanks, don't interfere," muttered Zeph. "We're here sleuthing, you know. You'll spoil everything."

"If that man does what he threatens—or tries to—I'll spoil something," declared Ralph, who understood some German, his hands involuntarily clenching as he heard the vituperations drip from the lips of the angry paperhanger. "Oh, I say!"

He started forward, brushed through the crowd, and sprang up the steps. The man had seized Otto by the throat and slammed him back against the wall. He struck the boy once in the face before Ralph got there.

"That's enough of that!" exclaimed the latter, thrusting himself between the two, and shouldering the paperhanger back.

"Vot you mean? Loafer!" ejaculated the German. "This is not for you. If I wish to punish my boy, it is my business yet."

"Not that way," declared Ralph, still keeping between him and the trembling Otto. "And he's not your boy, anyway."

"I hire him! He is my apprentice!" shouted

the angry man. "I do as I please mit him."

"Not in this country you don't," responded Ralph quickly. "You've made a mistake. We don't have your Prussian laws here. You don't beat and maul people weaker than yourself just because you happen to be a boss. Get out!" for the paperhanger was forcing himself forward again.

"Hand him one for me, Ralph!" cried Zeph Dallas, who had hastened to back up his friend.

The crowd was increasing. Men and boys came from both the hardware store and the stove shop. They were all distinctively German in their aspect; but Zeph knew, of course, that not all the Schwartzchilds or Blums were aliens. Indeed, some of them, like Freddy Holtz, who was in the crowd, were American born and subject to conscription under the new law.

"What you fellers doin' here?" asked Freddy Holtz, scowling at Zeph.

"Never you mind. If my friend wants to lick a couple of your friends, that needn't make no never-mind between you and me, Freddy."

Just then the paperhanger tried to get at the cowering Otto again, and Ralph Fairbanks would not let him. If the paperhanger's apprentice had only had pluck enough to run away the trouble would have been all over in a moment.

"What's Otto done, Mr. Pringer?" demanded Freddy Holtz, trying to get past Zeph on the steps.

The answer was in German. Freddy spoke again in English:

"What are these two railroad hoboes putting in their oar for? You get out of here, Dallas. My uncle owns this building, and Mr. Pringer is working for him."

Otto scrambled to the door at that. His face was tear-stained as well as streaked with paste. He stared, round-eyed and frightened, from Ralph to Zeph.

"Iss—iss dese railroad fellers?" he gasped.

"Sure we are," Zeph returned. "You're just as safe with us as a house. Don't be afraid of that Pringer. We won't let him hurt you."

But Otto was too frightened, it appeared, to listen to Zeph. He crowded past him and fled down the steps. Pringer shouted after him, but Ralph balked his attempt to follow the apprentice.

"You two fellows will get into trouble," growled Freddy Holtz, who was a burly looking fellow. But he offered to take no active part in the disturbance. "We got police here."

"Nobody but a German cop would arrest my friend," Zeph told him airily. "And the last

German cop on this beat died from over-eatin' at the delicatessen shop yonder."

Freddy Holtz eyed them gloomily as they passed down the steps. Pringer was explaining angrily to some of the other bystanders his side of the controversy. Ralph wanted to know something, and he asked the scowling nephew of the hardware dealer:

"What's that fellow's other name?"

"What feller?" asked Freddy.

"That Otto."

"Oh, that dumb-head?" growled Freddy. "He's Otto Mund. He's a greenhorn. And now he's beat it. He had a good job with Mr. Pringer, too."

"Dandy job," scoffed Zeph, putting in his oar. "Ten hours' work a day, and beatings free. *Ya!*"

But as Ralph went on with him and they left the excited group behind, the young train dispatcher said thoughtfully:

" 'Otto Mund,' is it? We've got a fellow working at the roundhouse named Jake Mund. I wonder if they are related."

CHAPTER VI

THE TROOP TRAIN ORDER

"Well, what do you think of that bunch?" whispered Zeph Dallas excitedly. "A lot of Heinies! And I bet the feller that threw that message into your office window was in the crowd."

"You couldn't pick him out, I suppose?" asked the chief dispatcher, smiling.

"Freddy Holtz, maybe. But no; I don't believe Freddy would have the pluck. He's one of these mouth organs, that's all. Always blowing about what he is going to do, but never doing it."

"He'll make a good soldier yet," said Ralph dryly. "Wait till they get him in camp."

"He's away down the list. They won't call him for months," Zeph returned. "And he says his uncle's going to buy him off."

"A lot of good Schwartzchild's money will do toward getting Freddy free," scoffed Ralph. "That bribing business don't go. The few ex-exemption boards that have been disloyal have

been brought up with a sharp turn. You can wager our Secret Service is wide awake."

"Ah!" sighed the amateur detective, "I'd love to get into that branch of the service."

"That looks better than working under Mr. Bob Adair when he calls on you, does it?" laughed Ralph. "Or acting as confidential advisor to me? Say, now, Mr. Detective, what good has it done us to come over here to the Cliffs?"

They were walking on slowly. Zeph looked around slyly and then advanced his lips nearer his friend's ear.

"Say! did you look down that hall—to the rear? The hall where Otto spilled the paste over his boss?"

"Not particularly," admitted Ralph Fairbanks.

"There's a window there. And both sashes are out. That window is in a nice situation—just about opposite your office window," said Zeph eagerly.

"I noticed it before we came over here to High Street. Now, it would be easy for a feller to stand right at that window with a slingshot and fling that message across to you."

"But, goodness me, Zeph! Who was it did that very thing?"

"Don't know—yet."

"And our visit to Little Germany hasn't ex-

plained a thing," added Ralph. "Come on. Let's get some lunch and go back to work. Something may come up to explain all this."

Ralph's guess seemed proved at ten minutes to three that afternoon. His telephone rang, and when he put the receiver to his ear he was very much startled to hear a voice say:

"To-night's the night, Fairbanks."

It was a repetition of the first line of that strange message! Ralph could scarcely stammer:

"Is that you, Super?"

"Yes. To-night's the night, I tell you. She'll be delivered to our lines some time during the evening. The exact time is not to be known yet. But you can figure in a general way that she'll reach Stanley Junction somewhere around one o'clock, or the like."

Ralph had recovered from his momentary excitement, and as he perfectly recognized the superintendent's voice, he said:

"That will not interfere much with our regular schedule. I shall sidetrack Number Eighteen here and Number Sixty-four at Fareway. And——"

"Never mind. Keep it to yourself. Make your arrangements at the last moment," advised his superior quickly. "And don't tell anybody what

you are going to do—not even over this wire. We don't know who may be listening in."

"Well?" queried the chief dispatcher. Evidently he could not take the superintendent into his confidence about the strange message without going to see him personally.

"Adair has made full and complete arrangements for guarding the line," added the superintendent before hanging up the receiver. "The dicks will be as thick as fleas along the right-of-way to-night. Good-bye."

But Ralph Fairbanks was in no confident frame of mind. According to the message that had been flung into his window some gang of conspirators had known of the coming of the troop train, and that it would come to-night, even before the high officials of the railroad knew it. It was a discovery that bred much dissatisfaction in the chief dispatcher's thoughts.

He gave his mind to the handling of the troop train, however—which he thought might be in several sections. At least, there would be a thousand or eleven hundred men aboard the first section of the train, a full battalion.

In all probability there would be a call for a fresh engine for each section here at Stanley Junction. Many of the heavy camel-back mountain climbers were used on Ralph's division; al-

though of late a newer type of locomotive of which No. 1001, fresh on the iron to-day, was the finest specimen.

He glanced through his schedule and saw that No. 1001 was due on her return run with the express that arrived at Stanley Junction at 5 : 8.

"Jenks is a trustworthy man, and he's got a good tallowpot running with him," thought Ralph, who kept in mind the crews of the division, as well as the rolling stock. "I'll speak to the yard foreman and have him notify Jenks and his partner for a midnight call. We'll give the boys the best we have, as they roll over our division."

Just on top of this decision Ralph Fairbanks heard a sudden eruption of voices outside. There was excitement in the train dispatchers' room and in the yard below his windows. Several switch engines seemed suddenly to be shrieking their lungs out in warning.

"What's up now?" the young chief dispatcher muttered, and sprang to the window to crane his head and the upper part of his body out of it. Down in the yard the hullabaloo continued.

A voice shouted behind him some message he could not catch. Ralph turned from the window and saw one of the telegraph operators at his door.

"What's up?"

"That new mill, Thousand and One, is coming into the yard, running wild, Mr. Fairbanks!"

"One Thousand and One? The new machine?"

"That's her!" declared the operator briefly. "We only got the tip. She passed Coolidge hitting only the high spots."

"But Jenks and his fireman?" gasped the chief dispatcher, starting for the outer office.

"Don't know. They must have jumped or something. There she goes! Blooey!"

There was a thunderous crash in the yard. Ralph darted through the big room and joined John Glidden at a window from which the entire spread of the yard could be viewed.

The roundhouse, a semi-circular brick structure, was some distance down the tracks. They could not see the turntable before it, but the spectators in the dispatchers' office immediately were aware that No. 1001 had not been ditched.

Instead, she had been allowed the right-of-way across the table and had gone smashing into a stall in the house. As Ralph reached the manager's side the pilot and stripped front of the huge new locomotive came through the brick wall and —stopped!

"Who did that?" demanded Ralph angrily. "Why wasn't she ditched, or switched on to the west siding when she entered the yard? Where's

the yard master? Who's at fault there, anyway?"

He saw the long and gangling Pelly coming slowly up from the scene of the wreck. He hailed him as soon as Pelly came within sound of his voice.

"Who allowed that engine to run into the roundhouse, Pelly?"

"Oh! That you, Mr. Fairbanks?" drawled the tall oiler. "Didn't she make a bull's-eye? Jim-i-ny!"

"Who did it?" snapped the chief dispatcher, for Glidden was speechless at this juncture.

"Who did what?"

"Who threw that switch?"

"Oh! That's it, eh? Why, Jake Mund. He made that bonehead play. He thought he was doing something smart, I reckon. She'd have gone on to the west siding and slammed the bulkhead. Might have crumpled up her pilot and shook her up some.

"But Jake seen to that. She might's well be rebuilt now, from her trucks up. And she's jest naturally knocked out about ten square yards of brick wall. It sure is a mess, Mr. Fairbanks."

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUR APPROACHES

THERE was a serious matter on Ralph Fairbanks' mind during these mid-months of 1917, something of which he was chary of speaking to anybody. He had been told by everybody that his highest duty lay in holding his situation with the Great Northern. The railroads were in the first lines of the country's defence.

Yet Ralph fully realized that somebody else could be broken in as chief dispatcher of the division of the road of which he had charge. The company, through its president, had asked exemption for him along with other important employees; but that did not settle the matter in Ralph's mind.

He was not wishful of escaping the draft. He was truly patriotic, and, at the best, he felt that to accept exemption under the industrial clause was dodging the issue.

In his mind it was merely: Would he fight or not? At the call of his country for troops to fight the Hun, was he willing to respond or did

he wish to escape the danger of the trenches through a technical claim?

He believed he was perfectly healthy and physically able to stand the training of the military camps. He was not a physical coward. Often during his career on the railroad he had been in peril, and had come through such trials with flying colors.

Although his mother was a widow and she had no other relative save Ralph, they were now in comfortable circumstances and their support assured even if he did not remain in the railroad's employ. He could not claim exemption because of his mother's dependency.

Only the day before he had been called by his board and had appeared before the doctors for a physical examination. Something which they had told him surprised Ralph Fairbanks, and immediately upon leaving the board he had gone to an enlistment station for the Regular Army at City Square.

There he had made application for enlistment, and had stripped in the little back room where the keen-eyed army surgeon looked him over with pleased aspect, for Ralph certainly looked athletic enough.

Ralph suffered the examination grimly, and without saying a word. Although the surgeon

felt so sure of him he neglected no point in his scrutiny.

Suddenly the army surgeon halted, stood off from Ralph, and stared him straight in the eye.

"Have you been examined before, young man?" he asked. Ralph nodded. "What did the physicians tell you?"

"Something that I did not believe," the young fellow said frankly.

"Something you did not want to believe, you mean?" Again Ralph nodded. "You can't get by with it," the surgeon said. "Don't go bothering about enlistment offices. We have a hard and fast rule regarding that trouble, and you cannot possibly get by with it."

"Is—it——?"

"Is it dangerous?" broke in the surgeon. "I could not say. Some people live long lives in much worse shape than you are in. But the danger is there. A sudden exertion—or an overstrain. Half a dozen things might happen which would work serious results because of your condition. Sorry, young man. We can't take you. And you're a pretty specimen otherwise."

This experience was continually in Ralph Fairbanks' mind. Even while so greatly excited over the coming of the troop train and the incidents connected with it, the young chief dispatcher was

thinking over and over again of what the doctors had said to him.

He had allowed his mother to believe that he was satisfied with the industrial claim for exemption put forth by the president of the G. N. on his behalf. He had not dared tell her anything about the physical trouble which the physicians had discovered.

It was not that he was frightened by the possibility which the surgeons pointed out to him. Like most young fellows he was troubled mainly to find that he was not perfectly fit. He was anxious, too, and with good cause, on his mother's behalf.

He had given her to understand on the previous evening that in all probability he would be exempted by his board, and refrained from going into details. Suspecting how deeply her son felt in the matter, Mrs. Fairbanks said little regarding the conscription of the young men of the land for military purposes. It was a sore subject with Ralph.

At supper time this evening, following the wreck of the new locomotive in the Stanley Junction railroad yard, Ralph entered the house rather unexpectedly. At least, Mrs. Fairbanks had not looked for him at just that moment, and he came into the kitchen where she was busy, to discover

her giving way to emotion that she would have hidden from him.

"What's the matter, Mother? Not in tears?" Ralph cried. "For pity's sake! what's gone wrong with the cooking? Why the weeps?"

He put his arm about her shoulders and snuggled her up to him as he spoke laughingly.

"You surely haven't heard any bad news?" he added.

"Oh, Ralph! how can you?" she murmured. "It's the very worst of news!"

"Goodness! whose old cat is dead? Let's hear about it."

He would not encourage her in giving way to unhappy moods; and now he supposed nothing really serious had occurred.

"Oh, Ralph!" she said, wiping her eyes again, "Mrs. Frederic Trumpet was in to see me this afternoon."

"Of course!" groaned Ralph, patting her shoulder. "There's a cheerful soul—I don't think! I suppose she had heard that two or three transports have been sunk, or something like that. She's the worst kind of a pro-German, and ought to be interned."

"Oh, nothing like that!" his mother replied. "Mrs. Trumpet's nephew was called before the draft board just as you were yesterday."

"Oh!" growled Ralph. "And they found he had flat feet or something, I suppose."

"It was not about him. He was there when you were there, Ralph. Didn't you see him?"

The young railroader started. He suspected instantly what had happened. His countenance lost its cheerful expression and he looked warily into his mother's face.

"I don't know the fellow," he said gruffly. "And I don't believe he knows me."

"Oh, yes, he does know you," his mother assured Ralph. "He saw you there. After you went out he heard what the doctor said about you, too!" and Mrs. Fairbanks began to weep again.

Ralph was stricken dumb for the moment. The very worst that he could have imagined had happened. He had intended keeping his mother quite uninformed of the medical report.

"Oh, now, Mother," he began. But the woman was not to be pacified easily.

"Mrs. Trumpet told me her nephew heard just what the doctor said. He said about you: 'There goes a fellow who would make a mighty fine soldier, but he's got a rotten heart.' Then he explained to the chairman of the board, Judge Leslie, that you had what doctors call 'a pronounced murmur.' Oh, Ralph! You might drop dead any

moment!" And Mrs. Fairbanks wrung her hands.

"Nonsense! Who told you such a crazy thing? That old gossipy Trumpet!"

"Don't speak so impolitely of Mrs. Trumpet," admonished the mother, wiping her eyes.

"Goodness me! I don't love her," said her son in disgust. "And now she has run to you and tattled this——"

"It's just what the doctor said, isn't it?"

"How do I know what he said?" returned Ralph, rather crossly. "He must be an Old Betty himself to say such stuff where others could hear it."

"But *have* you a bad heart? And I never knew it!" moaned Mrs. Fairbanks.

"Well, I never knew it myself; and I don't more than half believe it now. Anyway, they tell me that lots of people live long lives with heart-murmurs, and leaking valves, and all that."

"But it may strike you down at any time!" Mrs. Fairbanks wailed.

"Say, Mother! I might be hit with a brick falling off a chimney almost any time. Or a sign might blow down and hit me. An accident is likely to happen at any moment."

"But your heart!"

"It's never bothered me any yet," returned

Ralph. "Oh, of course, I shall be careful——"

"Oh, my boy! you must not exert yourself. I shall be afraid every time you go to work."

"Nonsense! My work at present calls for no particular exertion of body. And this heart difficulty is nothing new. It's a settled thing. Perhaps I was born with it. No telling."

"Oh!"

"Now, please stop Oh-ing and Ah-ing," he urged her, patting her shoulder once more. "Brace up! Just think of how I used to work during my first years with the Great Northern. As long as this old heart didn't cut up rusty while I was firing on a locomotive, or while I worked in the roundhouse or in the switch tower, it's not likely to bother me now."

"But you must never run upstairs, or over-lift, or over-exert yourself," she urged, sighing. "Now, promise me, Ralph."

"Sure!" he said easily. "And you promise me not to worry. Goodness! You have been grouching because you feared I would be taken in the draft; and now they won't take me, you are worrying worse than ever. Can you beat it?"

"But Ralph! I never suspected there was anything physically wrong with you."

"Then forget it. We'll make believe there isn't anything wrong with me. There is a lot more

wrong with the railroad. We had a mighty bad piece of luck this afternoon, Mother."

"No! You don't mean it?" she cried, her attention turned at once from his personal trouble. "What has happened?"

"You've heard me speak of the big new engine that was coming from the locomotive works at Philadelphia? The biggest and finest locomotive the G. N. ever owned?"

"Yes," his mother agreed.

"She made one trip to Rockton, and on her return met with a bad accident. Up there at Coolidge the water got low and Jenks broke off to fill up at the tank while the baggageman was taking in trunks at the station.

"I don't know how it came about. Both Jenks and his tallowpot are good men. But they both got down on the cinders to monkey around with their oilers, I suppose, and in some way One Thousand and One started."

"Not with the throttle at central?" gasped his mother, who knew something about a locomotive herself.

"So it's supposed. They say Jenks is one wild eagle-eye. It doesn't seem that a brand new piece of mechanism like that could slip if he latched it properly. Anyhow, away One Thousand and One started, tore down into the yards, and there an-

other bonehead play put the nice new engine into the scrap-pile." Ralph shook his head as he sat down to his supper.

"Funny about that," he continued thoughtfully. "Any yardman ought to have known enough to switch a wild engine on to a free siding and let her bang against the bumper. There was plenty of chance for that to be done."

"And what was done, Ralph?" asked Mrs. Fairbanks.

"A fellow named Mund, a German who works around the roundhouse, threw the switch to the turntable. The table happened to be set just right, and the new mill flew right into the roundhouse and out through the back wall."

"My!"

"Some wreck," went on the young dispatcher. "Stripped the boiler of everything. It will take half the night to jack her out of there. And One Thousand and One will have to be rebuilt after one day in action. It will look nice on the M.M.'s report.

"Jenks and his sidepartner will be up on the carpet for it. I don't see how they will get out of it. But this Mund! Well, John Glidden sent out for him by one of the other hands, and he'd skipped."

"He ran away?" queried Mrs. Fairbanks.

"The man who caused the new engine to be so badly wrecked?"

"And the roundhouse wall is wrecked, too," said Ralph grimly. "Looks bad. He's a German of the worst kind. Only this morning I overheard him ranting about the troop train. Some of these Germans are as venomous as puff-adders."

"Oh, Ralph, I hope you will be careful! Don't get into trouble with any of the Germans! They —they are so ugly!" and Mrs. Fairbanks shook her head dubiously.

"Do you suppose German mothers in Germany are advising their sons to be careful not to hurt the feelings of Americans who may be in their locality?" asked Ralph, laughing. "That's the difference. Americans feel as though they must be hospitable to all these foreigners who come here. It's the way we are brought up. We go around pussyfooting, trying not to hurt the feelings of fellows who would, if they dared, stick knives into our backs."

"My dear boy! don't speak so bitterly," his mother protested.

"Well, things are getting hot around the railroad yards," he confessed. "I believe the super and the master mechanic will come to the point where Germans and Austrians will be turned off.

That Jake Mund was threatening this morning, I tell you. And to-night——"

He halted, not having intended saying anything to his mother about the near approach of the first troop train.

"What happens to-night, Ralph?" she asked, sitting down with him and sipping her tea while he ate with his usual robust appetite.

"I'm going to take a couple of hours' nap, and then go back to the office. There may be a tangled schedule around midnight or later, and I want to be on the job."

"Oh, dear!" said his mother, sighing again. "You seem to have no regular hours since they put you in the train dispatchers' office, Ralph. You should have your unbroken rest."

But he laughed at that. "'Unbroken rest'?" he repeated. "Whoever heard of a railroad man in any department getting that? No; I shall have to go back to the yards. But I'll be home on the owl car. Don't wait up for me, Mother."

CHAPTER VIII

PELLY REPORTS

THE second-trick men, so called, did not hold the train dispatchers' office entirely by themselves when Ralph Fairbanks returned about half-past ten. Zeph Dallas was hanging around, and so was another visitor.

"Want to see you half a jiff, Mr. Fairbanks," said the lanky man lounging in the corner, but who brought himself to his feet as though he were built in sections.

"Is it you, Pelly?" asked Ralph.

"What's left of me. I ought to be in bed right now. This is no time of night for me to be up. I need my beauty sleep."

"Don't go to getting too beautiful, Pelly," said Zeph Dallas. "It may strike in, and that would be fatal."

Once in the office of the chief dispatcher, Pelly became serious. Ralph turned on the shaded light above his desk and sat down, motioning the tall man to a seat. Pelly glanced at the window, and then pulled his chair out of range of it.

"Don't know just who might be lookin' in," he remarked. "You sit here mighty careless-like, Mr. Fairbanks. Somebody up there on the Cliffs might plug you."

Ralph stared at him curiously. "What do you know about anybody flinging things into my window, Pelly?" he asked.

"Did they?"

"A message. I guess you heard of it outside," and Ralph nodded toward the bigger office. "There's always a leak in a telegraph room."

The tall man chuckled. "I bet it was from one of these Huns about here. Remember, you asked me to look up Jake Mund?"

"Yes. What have you got to report?" asked Ralph. "Of course, I have no official business to interfere in this; but I was curious about the man."

"Shucks! I was more than curious," said Pelly. "I wanted to know myself why that Hun slung Thousand and One into the roundhouse. Believe me, Mr. Fairbanks, that was some grand old wreck."

"Yes. I went down and had a look at it. The man must have been crazy."

"Or mighty smart. He couldn't easy have done the road more harm."

"It doesn't seem possible that it was a plot to

smash the engine," Ralph said slowly. "Mund got rattled."

"Maybe. But he's more than rattled now."

"What do you mean?"

"He's sloped."

"Do you mean he has cleared out?" cried Ralph.

"That's what, Mr. Fairbanks. Lit out. Clean. I went over to his boarding place. He ain't a married man. That is, not as any of us knows."

"No? But he had some family," the chief dispatcher said quickly.

"Well, not exactly. There was a boy lived there with him, they told me; boy named Otto. He's come here only recently, the woman who keeps the boarding house thought. She says this Otto is a regular greenhorn."

"I had heard there was such a boy."

"Yep. He's lit out with his Uncle Jake. They packed up and went in a hurry. Jake evidently was scared at what he did this afternoon down here in the yards."

"Of course, the boy had nothing to do with the smashup of that locomotive."

"Sure not. Reckon Jake saw his chance and jumped in and did that. He was ugly this morning, you remember. Some of the telegraph poles out yonder ought to be decorated by a few like him."

"I wouldn't say that, Pelly," Ralph observed. "We don't know that the man is anything more than a big-mouthed chap who talks too much. And the boys get 'em mad."

"The Germans around here ought to sing pretty small," growled Pelly, rising. "Well, I can't do anything more for you, can I, Mr. Fairbanks?"

"Keep your eye open for Jake. If you see him I want to talk with him. I feel, somehow, as though he wasn't getting a fair deal after all."

"Say!" Pelly remarked as he made for the door, "he'd have a hard time explaining that bonehead play this afternoon. I thought Mr. Glidden would froth at the mouth."

He went out, chuckling. Zeph Dallas immediately came in.

"I bet I've doped it all out, Fairbanks," he said, with vast assurance.

"Good for you!" exclaimed Ralph. "Tell a fellow. Don't keep a good thing to yourself."

"Oh," the amateur detective replied, "you have got your hammer out, have you? Well, just muffle that."

"I promise you I sha'n't knock until you have completely freed your mind," the chief dispatcher assured him.

"That Otto was the fellow who shot that message over to you," Zeph said eagerly.

"Fine as silk!" declared Ralph. "But tell me: Why should he do that?"

"Well—er—he's a Heinie, for one thing. And he was right there, you know. He would likely have some glue around, for they use glue in the sizing the paperhangers put on the walls, and they put glue into the flour paste they use, too."

"You don't mean that you've got it doped out," Ralph said, rather scornfully. "You mean you have thought out a possibility. You don't prove anything. I don't know a thing against the poor chap except that his name is a palindrome."

"Good-*night!*" exclaimed Zeph. "What's that?"

" 'Otto' reads the same both ways—forward and back. That's a palindrome," laughed Ralph. "But that is really no crime, you know."

"You can laugh," said Zeph Dallas. "But I am going gum-shoeing for that Otto Mund, and without delay."

"Easy," advised his friend. "Don't do anything to scare the fellow away. We may want to talk to the poor chap yet. Do you know that his uncle has got into trouble?"

He swiftly told Zeph of what had happened in the yards during the afternoon. The wreck of the big new engine had not yet been noised abroad.

"He's one of the plotters—that Jake Mund," Zeph announced with confidence.

"Goodness, Zeph," Ralph chuckled, "I'd love to be as sure of one single solitary thing as you are of everything! I believe Mund merely pulled a bonehead stunt, that's all."

"And after what you heard him say this morning?"

"Oh, there's a lot of 'em saying things they'll be sorry for later. Suppose something should happen to this first troop train, for instance——"

The door opened and one of the operators, holding a bit of flimsy at arm's length, thrust in his head.

"I say, Boss," he asked, "what's this Number Forty-eight, special, just reported from Mongolia? She ain't on sched."

"She's coming, is she?" demanded Ralph eagerly. "How many sections?"

"Doesn't say anything about more than one. But what is she?"

"Troop train. Whose time is she in on?"

"Why, she laps over that night freight—Number Forty. But that's easy. The line is pretty free from now on till three-thirty, you know."

"I'll go over the schedule in a minute and give her right-of-way where needed," said the chief dispatcher.

"All right! I told the boys you didn't come back to-night for nothing, Chief," and the operator went out, grinning.

Ralph already had a sheet prepared before him on his desk. He went over it, marking up the expected time of Forty-eight, special, at each reporting station until she would reach the Junction.

"From here on to Rockton she will be under our care. But I can lay out the time card now and then trust her to the third-trick men," Ralph said to Zeph. "Wait a bit, and I'll go along to the Square with you."

"Aren't you going to wait to see her go through?" Dallas asked, with some excitement.

"No. And don't you hang around like the chorus of a Greek tragedy to hoot for her when she goes through. The fewer know she's on the division, the better."

"It's plain those blamed Huns know she's coming."

"And they won't dare make any open announcement of the fact," Ralph said. "Everything is prepared. I know there is a good engine and a good crew waiting down at the roundhouse all ready to take Forty-eight over when she arrives. I'm going home myself."

He waited, however, until the troop train had

been reported from a point not far up the main line. She would thunder through Stanley Junction and into the yards in a few minutes when Ralph and Zeph left the office of the train dispatcher.

Zeph lived on the other side of town; but he walked with Ralph to City Square where the owl car on the interurban line stood ready for its run into the suburbs.

"Do you know," said Zeph, "I can't get this car out of my head? That message to you, you know, Fairbanks. 'The Owl Car.' If it doesn't refer to this car, what does it refer to?"

"Ask me an easier one," his friend replied.

He neglected to tell Zeph Dallas that his own puzzling over that very point had actually made him wait for this last car out of town. Ralph did not know what to expect, but he feared the mystery. He waved good-night to Zeph as the car started.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT THE MESSAGE MEANT

THE interurban car was not crowded. Indeed, it seldom was at this late hour. Those suburbanites who attended the theater, for instance, in the heart of Stanley Junction, returned home on earlier cars than this, which left the station in City Square at five minutes past one.

Ralph Fairbanks nodded to the conductor and entered the closed car. Perhaps a dozen patrons were in the seats. He walked forward.

A few of the occupants of the car the chief dispatcher of this division of the G. N. knew, at least by sight. The proprietor of a City Square restaurant; the clerk of the Mansion House who was off duty at one o'clock each night; the young woman who was cashier at the railroad station lunch room; and others.

In the corner of a forward seat was a thick-set man with his hat pulled well down over his eyes. Ralph looked at this individual twice, but he could not place him.

Billy Bradley was running the car. Of course,

there was a rule against passengers talking to the motorman, but Ralph ignored it as he would have ignored that railroad law which forbids passenger-riding in the cab of a locomotive. He liked Billy and often rode on the platform with him.

The night was far from cold, although the swift motion of the car caused a goodly breeze to blow in their faces, for Billy had his window open.

"Nice night, Fairbanks," the motorman said, recognizing the passenger by the latter's reflection in the windowpane beside him.

"So they say. It will be nicer to my mind later."

"What's the matter? Got the whole responsibility of the old G. N. on your young shoulders?" and the motorman chuckled.

"Just about," agreed Ralph. "When we get along to the top of the School Street grade pull down and listen for something."

"Only one regular train this time o' night," said Bradley. "A special?"

"Yes."

"Some of the brass hats going through?" asked Bradley, referring to the high officials of the railroad company.

"More'n that," Ralph told him.

Bradley looked around sharply. "You don't

tell me the boys are going through to-night?" he asked.

"It's no harm now to tell you that's a fact," Ralph said, nodding. "She's about due. We ought to hear her whistling in a few minutes."

"Well," muttered Billy Bradley, "if it wasn't for the wife and the kids I'd be after shouldering a gun myself."

"Hark!" exclaimed Ralph.

The owl car had shrieked around the curve at the top of School Street. There was a gentle grade from this point down to the railroad culvert where the street ran under the tracks. The bridge was a cement structure, the width of the street and as long as the right-of-way was wide. Under the bridge was piled-deep shadow.

Bradley released the brake. They listened. In the distance sounded the "hoo-hoo-hoo!" of the approaching train. The car door behind them was suddenly jerked open.

Bradley cast back a glance and wound up his brake again. The thick-set man who had sat in the corner of the first seat was about to alight. He jumped off at the head of the grade, before the car came to a complete stop.

His hat brim flapped up as he jumped, and Ralph Fairbanks caught a glimpse of the man's face.

"What's the matter?" muttered Bradley, as he took the conductor's signal and started ahead again.

"Do you know that fellow?"

"The chap who just got off?"

"Yes."

"Never saw him before. What's the matter with him?"

Ralph was craning his neck to see back. The thick-set figure was quickly out of sight. But the young railroader was sure he knew him.

"His name's Pringer, I believe. He's a paper-hanger. Owns his own business."

"Don't know him," repeated Bradley. "There, she whistles again!"

He was more interested in the coming troop train. The owl car was sliding easily down the School Street grade. The outlines of the cement bridge and the street-culvert under it became plain.

Up there on the railroad right-of-way, as far as he could see in either direction, Ralph knew the guards were stationed. The troop train having come so far safely, it seemed she must go through Stanley Junction all right.

There was a glow against the sky. The engine exhaust was free. Again the shriek of her whistle sounded clearly through the night.

"I meet the freight down here pretty near every night, Fairbanks," said the motorman reflectively.

"Yes. The special's on Number Forty's time. That was all arranged. She's pretty close to the second, too," and he snapped open his hunting-case watch to glance at the illuminated dial.

"Heavy train," remarked Bradley, hearing the trucks roaring over a trestle.

"Ten or eleven coaches. And they're packed, too, I reckon," laughed Ralph. "Ah! there's her headlight."

The glare of it flashed for a moment over their heads. The owl car was running swiftly down to the black maw of the cement bridge. Its own headlight glimmered along the rails.

"What's that?"

Ralph, suddenly leaping forward, hissed the words in Bradley's ear. There was no moving object under the bridge; but something lay upon the left-hand rail.

The motorman wound up his brake with startled haste. Ralph flung open the gate on the left side of the platform and swung himself down on the step.

Hanging on with his right hand, his grip upon the handrail unbreakable, the young fellow swung forward, stretching his left hand to seize the bundle on the rail.

Had he missed it! Afterward this thought made Ralph Fairbanks drip with the sweat of fear.

The bundle wrapped in newspaper was loosely tied. He caught the string and swung it up and lightly aboard the car, which halted directly over the spot where the bundle had lain.

Overhead the troop train roared across the bridge. The conductor of the owl car came to thrust his head out of the door, his eyes blinking.

"What you got? A baby?" he drawled.

Ralph tore open the package. One glance within, and he gave way to his feelings in a half-stifled cry.

"Dynamite! Three sticks wired together," he gasped. "Enough to blow us and the bridge to eternity."

"Great catfish!" muttered Bradley. "What about the troop train?"

"What troop train?" demanded the conductor. "Wasn't that the freight that just went through?"

Bradley explained, for Ralph could not talk for the moment. The whole meaning of the message that had come to him so strangely through the window of his office was now open to him.

He should have given it more regard! The entire plot of the murderers, murderers in intent, at

least, had been given away in that strange letter, and he should have taken the superintendent immediately into his confidence about it.

That John Glidden had believed it merely a joke should not have so influenced the young chief dispatcher's opinion. He felt that to be a fact now.

Why, even Zeph Dallas had been wiser than he had been. Zeph had considered the thing of moment.

The time, the threatened act, and how the troop train was to be halted had been plainly stated in that brief note. The conspirators had known clearly the time the troop train would come through—and that hours before the officials of the G. N. knew it!

And the deep ingenuity of the scheme! This thought shocked Ralph Fairbanks for the moment more than anything else.

It was known to the criminals, of course, that the right-of-way of the Great Northern would be closely guarded. To set a bomb or dynamite for the troop train to hit would be practically impossible.

But the shadows under the School Street bridge would hide this bundle of explosives; and the owl car would be sure to be on time. Had the car hit the dynamite, car, bridge, and the troop train

itself would have been completely shattered.

"D'you s'pose it's re'lly dynamite?" whispered the conductor.

The few passengers in the car were half asleep. They paid no attention to the excited car crew and Ralph on the front platform.

But the latter believed that back near the top of the hill a short, stocky man, of pronounced Teutonic aspect, was waiting and listening for an explosion that did not come off!

"This is up to you, boys," said Ralph, finally regaining his self-possession. "It's nothing to do with me. You fellows report to the police and take all the honors. It's enough for me to know that Forty-eight's gone safely through."

"There'll be a big ruction over this," said Billy Bradley, preparing to start the car. He was much disturbed.

"But who did it?" asked the conductor.

"Didn't see a soul down here," declared Bradley. "Did you, Ralph?"

"No. But the package could not have been here long. Even if a car didn't come along on this track, an automobile might have hit it. It was a close shave, sure enough."

"'Twas a wicked piece of work," the conductor said, as the car moved on slowly beneath the bridge. "We'd have been blown sky-high, and

the bridge and train, too! What will we do with the dynamite, Billy?"

"Leave it be," said the motorman. "You can bet I am going to drive this car mighty easy out to Woodbridge and back. And when we get into town again we'll deliver the explosive to the police."

"Suppose it blows up, anyway?" suggested the conductor, rather panic-stricken.

"It won't," Ralph told him. "And you can't dump it off here, at the side of the road, and leave it for somebody else to pick up."

"I don't see but you get out of it easy," growled the conductor.

Ralph Fairbanks, however, was much shaken. He crept into the house a little later and went to bed without his mother's hearing him. But he could not sleep for some time and imagined that all sorts of things might happen.

That troop train rushing through the night, possibly with other and similar perils threatening the brave boys aboard of her, disturbed his mind. A small slip, and the bridge and the train would have been wrecked. Foolish as the warning had been, he felt now that he had been derelict in not taking the affair more seriously.

The enemy was plainly at work against the welfare of the nation. The "front" was not wholly

in France or where the actual fighting was going on.

He was at the front right here in Stanley Junction! Every few days now troop trains and ammunition trains might be expected over his division.

If conspirators had undertaken to stop this particular train, they would attempt similar crimes. "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther," King Canute had said to the tide. And what Canute said to the tide these plotters tried to say to the United States Government and the Great Northern Railroad!

"We'll see about that," muttered Ralph Fairbanks. "It's up to every one of us Americans to be on the watch for such rascals."

CHAPTER X

ON IMPULSE

When Ralph's mother called him in the morning, his first thought was of that paperhanger who had ridden out in the owl car to the head of the School Street hill.

"He's in it," the young dispatcher told himself confidently. "And he could not keep away from the scene of the crime.

"I wonder what he thought and how he felt when the dynamite failed to explode? And he sitting right in that car with us sixty seconds before!

"Of course, he did not actually put the stuff under the bridge. His *alibi* is perfect. Just the same, Mr. Pringer is going to be watched."

These thoughts occupied his mind for the most part while he was under his shower and was having his brisk rubdown. When he appeared at the breakfast table he was as fresh as a daisy in appearance. One would not have believed he had been under the mental strain of the night before.

But Mrs. Fairbanks remained in her unhopeful

mood. Ralph realized for almost the first time that his mother was growing old. The shock of her discovery regarding her son's physical condition had made a marked impression upon her—one that was not to be erased easily.

"Don't worry about me, Mother," he advised her, just before starting for the office. "If I've had this trouble some time—as I have, I suppose, the doctors being right—it has never bothered me. I've held a throttle, and slammed the fire-box door for many a hard run, and manipulated the block tower levers. I've never felt it. It's just a reason for escaping the draft, that's all it is," and he spoke bitterly at this point.

"Oh, but my dear Ralph!" she cried, "I would not want you in the army in any case."

"I'm not likely to get there," he returned, kissing her hastily and hurrying away.

"Be careful!" she cried after him from the open door. "Don't hurry!"

She watched him down to the corner where he caught the car on the interurban. Her anxiety suggested to her that he might drop in his tracks at any moment.

Out of his mother's sight, having waved cheerfully to her as he swung himself aboard the street car, Ralph gave little thought to the diagnosis of the army surgeon. He was not likely to become

a hypocondriac because of the doctor's warning.

He picked up a morning paper that some passenger had abandoned and looked through it swiftly. Here was a two-column article about the passing through Stanley Junction of the first troop train to come this way.

But there was not a word printed about the discovery of the dynamite under the School Street bridge. He had not expected to find that secret exposed. The police must have warned the motorman and conductor of the owl car to say nothing about it.

But Ralph proposed to take Mr. Bob Adair, head of the road's detective force, into his confidence as soon as he could get into communication with him. There was much rivalry between the railroad police and the city department, both would wish to discover and expose the conspirators who had come so near to murdering the troops as they went through the city.

Ralph came to the yards and station of the Great Northern in a very serious frame of mind. He walked down by the roundhouse to have a look at the wrecked wall. The half-destroyed No. 1001 was already on a flat, to be drawn to the repair shop. As Pelly had suggested, she had almost to be rebuilt from her trucks up.

Masons were at work on the roundhouse wall.

The yard foreman and the roundhouse foreman were both scolding about the absent Jake Mund.

"One foxy Dutchman!" growled one of the bosses. "I thought he was too thick to do any harm around here. But I feel more like cleaning out every man with a German name on my gang. I'm afraid of 'em."

"Say, we haven't any real German or Austrian names on the pay roll," interposed Ralph.

"Who says we haven't?" demanded one of the foremen. "You're all wrong there, Mr. Fairbanks. We've a raft of 'em."

"You're mistaken, Dolliver," declared the chief dispatcher. "Because their names are Gojmerak, or Radmanovich, or Vrema, or the like, they are not Austrians.

"Many of them belong to the smaller nations held in bondage by the Dual Empire. There are more than twenty of those little peoples who hate Austria-Hungary and Kaiser Bill, but are helpless. A lot of these 'hunyaks,' as the boys call them, are all right—going to be good Americans," urged Ralph.

Dolliver began to chuckle. "I reckon that's so," he admitted. "Some of 'em in my gang are asking me to change their names on the pay roll to American names. One feller that I never could call rightly by his name unless I had a cold in my

head and sneezed it, wants to be known as 'Abe Lincoln,' and I'm tempted to let him. He's read about Lincoln, and I don't think he'll disgrace the name."

"That's all right," growled the other boss, "but Jake Mund wasn't that kind. I'd like to get these two paws of mine on the back of his neck."

"I still hold that maybe the man only got rattled," Ralph observed, as he went on to the train dispatchers' offices.

He started up the stairs and nearly fell over a figure sitting there in the shadow. For a moment it startled him to find somebody lurking here.

"What's up?" he asked sharply.

The figure stood up, and then Ralph came near uttering a really startled cry. It was the weak-eyed, blinking, shaking figure of Otto Mund who had thrown the paste over his German boss the day before.

"I say, Mister," quavered the German youth, "can you help me to get a job?"

"On the railroad?" asked Fairbanks.

"*Ja!* The railroad on. I need a job," urged the boy, blinking at him.

"What's your name?" demanded Ralph, as though he did not recognize the applicant.

"Otto."

"Otto what?"

"Otto Smith—Schmidt it wass," stammered Otto. "But they tell me Smith is Amerikaner."

"How did you get over to this country, Otto?" Ralph asked directly. "You must have just come from Germany."

"Nein!" the other hastened to deny earnestly. "Not so. Mein beoples lif in Stockholm. I come from there as sailor. But I don't dare go back."

"Why not?"

"De German submarines," Otto whispered. "They chase the boat I am on yet. I run avay ven we reach dis side."

"And how came you to run away out here?" Ralph asked suspiciously. "What made you come to Stanley Junction?"

Otto blinked again and swallowed hard. "I—I—vell! I had an *Onkel.* He lifed here. He don't lif here no more. I get me a job mit a man. Yest'day him and me have a fight yet. I must work," said Otto earnestly.

"German efficiency," muttered Ralph. "So you don't want to be out of work even a day?" he asked, aloud.

"I must work," repeated the German boy.

"Hang around a bit and I'll see," advised the good-natured Ralph.

After all, Otto was not to be blamed for his

nativity. And if he wanted to be called 'Smith' —well, that was a good showing, too, thought Ralph.

Besides, he felt that maybe this was an opportunity to keep tab on Otto, and through him, perhaps, learn of members of the band that had sought to wreck the troop train the night before.

He had not lost sight of the fact that Zeph Dallas had figured out that Otto had flung the strange warning into Ralph's window. The latter might, or might not, accept Zeph's opinion in this matter as the truth. But he felt that to have Otto about would not be a bad idea.

He went into John Glidden's office and put the idea up to him. They needed a boy about the place. There was no porter to be spared from the station, and the dispatchers' offices and the stairs and hallways needed regular care.

"What's the use of getting a boy and putting him on the pay roll?" demanded Glidden. "First thing you know they'll grab him and make him a call-boy for the night crews, or something."

"They won't take this fellow," Ralph said.

"Why not?"

"He appears to be too thick. Can't talk much English. But I bet he can work, and we'll get the place cleaned up for once."

"All right. I'll O. K. his munificent salary of

nine dollars," returned the division manager. "How'd things go off last night, Fairbanks?"

"All right," Ralph told him. Then with some suspicion he asked: "You didn't hear anything, did you?"

"I know she went through; but I didn't know what time."

"Not long after one. Has Mr. Bob Adair called up this morning?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"I want to see him," Ralph said, as he departed to speak again to the German boy on the stairs.

In ten minutes he saw Otto at work with the broom and dustpan. The telegraph operators in the outer office received the idea of a general cleaning, as though it foredoomed dissolution.

"The old ranch has not been thoroughly cleaned," remarked Brodish, one of the first-trick men, "since Hector was a pup, and Hector's a big dog now!"

Otto was deeply grateful to Ralph for interfering in his behalf. He seemed an innocent sort of lad. And yet the young train dispatcher wondered if it were not possible that some of this innocence was assumed.

"I'll watch him," he thought. "It will never do to have a spy around here—at least a spy that is not distrusted. I wonder if Zeph did guess right

when he connected this lad with that letter flung into my window?"

He knew what none of these first-trick men in the big offices, no more than Glidden, had heard of the attempt to blow up the School Street bridge during the previous night. He got in touch with Mr. Bob Adair at his boarding place as soon as he could, the superintendent not having returned from Rockton.

The police had evidently not taken the railroad authorities into their confidence about the dynamite plot; or so judged Ralph from what Mr. Adair said over the telephone. Of course, the interurban people were, on the face of it, more interested than the Great Northern, for the explosives had been found upon the surface car tracks.

Ralph had excited the chief detective's interest so thoroughly that Adair came immediately over to the train dispatchers' offices to see him and talk it over.

"Well, young fellow, what is puzzling you now?" the detective asked Ralph. "You have spoiled my morning's sleep—and I did not get to bed until after that Forty-eight special went through."

"Nor did I," replied Ralph. "And at that, I guess you don't know by how very narrow a mar-

gin the troops got safely through Stanley Junction."

"Oh, we were on the watch, my boy," said Adair confidently.

"Yes. And so were other people, Mr. Adair. I guess I ought to have sent for you yesterday. But they said you were down the line, and I hated to bother you about something that looked to be only a joke."

"What was the joke?" Adair asked curiously.

Ralph told him of the "torpedo" which had been tossed into his window and showed him the threatening note. The detective pursed his lips and shook his head.

"This is in line with locking the door after the horse is stolen, isn't it, Fairbanks?" he said. "If it really meant anything of importance it would now be too late to fend against trouble."

"I realize that quite fully now, Mr. Adair," said Ralph gravely. "And I must hand it to Zeph. He believed it was of more importance than I did."

"Ah, did you take my smart young assistant into your confidence?" Adair asked, smiling.

Ralph continued his story and related his and Zeph's attempt to fathom the mystery of the note.

"Then," added the young fellow with increased gravity, "after all, the paper was a warning. Somebody tried to blow the troop train up."

"No! There wasn't a sign of trouble anywhere," Adair declared with positiveness. "I rode on the troop train myself, and I have received the reports from all my men. There wasn't a thing stirred from start to finish."

"By chance—or, rather, Providence—Mr. Adair," said Ralph seriously, "a most awful catastrophe was averted right here at Stanley Junction."

He rapidly told of his ride in the owl car the night before, and of the package of dynamite the motorman and he had found on the track under the School Street bridge.

The detective listened quietly; but his eyes glowed with interest.

"Nobody suspicious about?" he demanded.

Then Ralph had to speak of Pringer, the German paperhanger. "You'll see a boy out here sweeping up and dusting," added the chief dispatcher, and told him further about Otto and Jake Mund.

"I don't know whether there was a widespread plot or not. I don't *know* anything about it, of course," concluded Ralph. "But all these things, together with that note, look mighty queer."

"I should say they did—I should say they did," agreed Mr. Bob Adair. "I must look into this. You were wise to hire the boy. Keep your eye on

him. I'll have his uncle looked up. And that Pringer——"

"Zeph says there is a bunch of Germans up there on High Street who are so ugly that they would do anything. I begin to believe he is right," Ralph remarked as Mr. Adair left.

The idea of enemies being within striking distance of the Great Northern aroused Ralph Fairbanks' keen apprehension. He knew that there were several goods trains bound for the cantonments in the South coming through that very day. And when the ammunition factory at Proberst got to running on full time, several trains of high explosives would be passing over this division of the Great Northern each week.

Already the Government trains were beginning to knock out the regular schedules. Ralph had his hands full all day planning to get over his goods trains to clear the local passengers.

"Never saw such a mess of varnished cars since I began hammering brass," declared one of the operators in the outer office, coming in with a bunch of flimsies and a grouch that made his face look a yard long. "D'you know, they say the Government's going to grab all the roads so as to put the freight ahead of the fancy trains, Mr. Fairbanks? If they do, mere passengers had better learn to walk."

"If the Government wants to take the G. N., I reckon the directors are willing," Ralph said easily. "We're a hundred per cent. patriotic on this system, I hope."

"Maybe that will let us out," said the operator, thankfully.

"Don't you fool yourself! We fellows will have just as much work to do, if not more," said Ralph.

"Think so?"

"By winter, the super tells me, we'll have double our present traffic; unless they get to sending freight through, east and south, by aeroplane," and the young dispatcher chuckled.

"Believe me! I wouldn't want the T. M.'s job, then," groaned the operator.

"Don't lose any sleep. Our traffic manager was born for the job. Why, he was call-boy on the graveyard shift out in this very yard when my father was alive and at work," Ralph said. "It's these old-timers that the road will look to for extra work when the pinch comes."

"Oh," said the operator, nodding, "I guess the most of us are game to nurse things along all right. We don't want any other system to beat out the Great Northern."

Ralph was glad to see that this was the spirit of most of the men he talked with, and in all

branches of the service. Railroaders as a class are born grumblers. They are, especially in the mechanical end, usually overworked and asked to do the impossible twenty times a day. Yet they seldom really balk, no matter how hard the job put up to them.

It was true that, like almost every other road in the country at that time, the Great Northern was short of rolling stock, and its delivery of new locomotives was away behind schedule. No. 1001, that ill-fated machine that had charged through the roundhouse wall, was only one of a dozen new engines that should have been delivered before this time to help in handling the enormously increased traffic of the system, an increase that had come suddenly.

After all, the country had jumped into the war unexpectedly. The pacifists had shouted so loudly that the people as a whole had been lulled into the belief that Germany would not seek to antagonize the United States to a point where she would have to join the Allies.

Now the railroads, the second line of defense, were not prepared to handle the rapidly increasing freight. From the window of his office, Ralph Fairbanks saw the loaded trains crawl slowly through the yard at all hours of the day, and knew the yard was blocked half a dozen times

every night with the overflow from the day freights.

Without adequate freight cars and with engines not powerful enough to climb the steep grades of the Mountain Division with a top-load, it was not to be wondered at that the local yards were crammed to overflowing with "dead" freight.

The Government was demanding right of way for supply and ammunition trains. Now, Ralph expected, every few days other troops trains would be along. Sometimes heavy freights could only run from siding to siding, perhaps twenty miles or less, before being set out to clear the main track for more important trains.

Forty times a day Ralph had to shift his schedules to fit emergencies which unexpectedly rose in this traffic tangle. He had never worked so hard, with his brain, at least, since becoming an employee of the Great Northern.

"Lucky those medical sharps," he thought grimly, "said nothing about brain-work being bad for a fellow with a jumpy heart. Huh! I wish now I was right in the trenches. It wouldn't be a patch on this!"

CHAPTER XI

TAKING NO CHANCE

Several days—and busy days they were for Ralph Fairbanks—passed, and he heard nothing at all from Mr. Adair. Nor from anybody else did he hear a word regarding the attempt to blow up the School Street bridge at the moment the troop train special passed through Stanley Junction.

He saw the owl car motorman once or twice, but Billy Bradley declared he and his partner, the conductor, had heard no word regarding the matter since turning the three sticks of dynamite over to the chief of police.

"He told us to keep our potato traps closed," remarked Billy, shrugging his shoulders, "and all would be well. He's some foxy Dutchman, that chief."

"What!" cried Ralph. "A German?"

"Didn't you know his name was Rhinemeyer?"

"I had forgotten that fellow was appointed by the commissioners last year," Ralph Fairbanks confessed.

"Yep. He's smart, they say. And he's probably gum-shoeing for those Huns who tried to blow us up."

"Humph!" muttered Ralph. "Setting a German after Germans! Sort of in the line of 'Set a thief to catch a thief.'"

"I don't know but Rhinemeyer may be as good an American as you or I, Ralph," said the motorman reflectively.

"That's just it!" exclaimed the younger fellow. "You never can tell. Lots of good Americans have German names; and it seems that many pro-Germans have supposedly American names. You don't know who to trust, Billy."

Ralph's watchfulness was keen in several directions. There was Otto "Smith," as the German boy preferred to be called. He seemed as grateful as a stray dog that has been fed by a kind hand. He could not do too much for Ralph.

The chief dispatcher's private office became immaculate. Never had the train dispatchers' offices received so much sweeping and dusting. But on one or two occasions Ralph came into his office unexpectedly and found Otto dusting his desk and handling the papers he had left there.

Not that there was really anything suspicious about this. The old desk needed clearing up, without a doubt. And yet——

On Sunday, when Otto had a day off, Ralph brought in a locksmith and had new locks put on all the drawers of the desk. The key to the old locks had been lost long before and the locks broken in forcing open the drawers.

There might never be anything of importance filed away in his desk; and yet, one could not tell when it might be necessary to lock up papers. Ralph was determined to take no chance with pro-German intrigue.

Although Mr. Adair's silence did not greatly astonish the chief dispatcher at Stanley Junction, he did begin to wonder, after a week or so, why he heard nothing from Zeph Dallas.

Usually Zeph was in to see him every day or two. And Ralph knew he had interested the amateur detective deeply in the strange note he had received and in the manner of its reception.

Ralph called Zeph up at the office where he was supposed to work. But, after missing him several times, Zeph's boss finally came to the telephone and wanted to know who it was who wished to speak with Dallas. Ralph explained immediately.

"I thought it might be you, Mr. Fairbanks," said the railroad official. "I know Zeph would want you to know that he is all right, but he is not here just now."

"He hasn't thrown up the job, has he?" cried Ralph.

"Oh, no! By no manner of means. Dallas is much more dependable than he used to be. But he has been borrowed."

"'Borrowed'?" repeated Ralph, puzzled.

"By Mr. Adair," said the other.

"Oh!"

"I guess you understand," said Zeph's boss quietly. "It's not to be talked about, especially over the telephone," and he hung up before the chief dispatcher could ask any more questions.

So Zeph had been set to work. Adair doubtless was raking the whole system of the Great Northern with a fine-toothed comb for the members of the gang that had undoubtedly planned to destroy the troop train as it passed over the School Street bridge.

"Whether this Rhinemeyer is pushing his police inquiry or not, Bob Adair is on the job," thought Ralph, with satisfaction. "And so is Friend Zeph. I wonder just what Zeph is doing in the matter?"

His own time was so closely engaged, however, that Ralph could not give much attention to surmises about Mr. Adair and Zeph. The superintendent of the system, Ralph's very good friend and benefactor, was taken suddenly ill. It threw

an enormous amount of extra work upon John Glidden as manager, or "supervisor," of the Mountain Division, and much of this increased responsibility naturally reverted to Ralph himself.

He had been in the habit of helping Mr. Glidden in every way possible, and, although work and responsibilities had increased in the dispatchers' department, Ralph could not refuse to help his friend when called upon during the day.

Ralph always served a full trick, from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon, and seldom got home before supper time at six or half-past six. Then he went back to his post and tried to help clear the yard during the second trick and before what was called the graveyard shift, of all stalled or dead freight.

In every yard of importance on almost any railroad system, this "graveyard shift" is the hardest worked gang of switchers and freight handlers employed on the road. All that Ralph could do previous to midnight in clearing the yard was appreciated to the full by Jack Hadley, the night yardmaster.

The G. N. had to work its freight trains over the passenger tracks, especially on this division. With the Government demanding right of way for supply and munition trains, and in some cases for strings of coal gondolas, loaded freight cars

were apt to be sidetracked in the Stanley Junction yard until it was maddening to consider breaking the blockade.

"Tell you what, Mr. Fairbanks," Jack groaned to Ralph one forenoon, as the latter came on duty and the yardmaster was going off after a nerve-racking spell of work, "I had to shift that string of empty reefers over on track eight, four times this blessed night, and eight of 'em have drawheads out. They're a mess!"

"Why don't you get rid of 'em? Send 'em out?" demanded Ralph.

"Fat chance!" growled the old man. "And us so short of locomotives that any old mill that will steam has to pull a load out of here heavy enough to make the engine humpbacked!

"I've tried for a week to switch those with missin' drawheads over on to the rip track. It'll take two hours to weed 'em out of the string, and when will I ever find two hours in the clear on the graveyard shift? Seems to me the day boys ought to do it."

"Too many specials passing through all the time," Ralph replied. "I guess we'll have to get you a derrick to pick up the cars that need repairing and swing them over to the rip track. Switching has got to be a fine art in this yard."

"You said something," the yardmaster mur-

mured, going on his way with sadly wagging head.

Pelly reported to Ralph in his office one day. He had been quietly searching for Jake Mund. Pelly was disappointed.

"That German sure did light out, hitting only on high," he complained. "He went so fast and so far, I guess, that we need never expect to see him around here again. If he was a bad actor, guess he's scared and won't trouble us any more."

Ralph did not fancy asking Otto about his uncle. The German boy seemed to be all right. He boarded with an American family whose patriotism could not be questioned.

The chief dispatcher of the division had even looked up, on his own account, the man Pringer, who had been Otto's boss, and who Ralph was confident had had some connection with the plot that had come so near to wrecking the School Street bridge.

Pringer had sold out his paperhanging business, it seemed. At least, another name was over the door of his little shop on High Street, and nobody knew where Pringer had gone.

"I wonder," thought Ralph, "if that whole bunch of Heinies didn't pick up stakes and hike out of the Junction altogether when their plans went wrong. I hope they did!"

Proberst reported the munition factory running in full swing and the trains of high explosives began to come through, pulled by the speediest engines and aiming for the Atlantic seaboard. Every time Ralph Fairbanks wrote a train-number down in red on his schedule sheet he did it with a thrill. He was helping do his share for the war by getting these trains through on time, and safely.

His mother worried a good deal over his close application to business. But he always advised her to think how much worse she would worry if they had taken him in the draft.

He said it with a laugh. But deep in his soul the young train dispatcher could not get over the bitter disappointment he had suffered when he had gone before the doctors for his examination.

If Mrs. Fairbanks had known how hard he worked, not merely the long hours he was engaged, she might indeed have had cause for worry. Ralph was losing flesh, and deep wrinkles were appearing between his eyes—the result of concentration of mind. His eyes had always been good, for a railroad man's eyes must be good. But he began to feel the strain upon his optic nerves, and he had his eyes tested and put on glasses at his desk.

"A stitch in time saves nine—or nineteen, I

don't know which it is," he told John Glidden. "But, anyway, maybe I can see better to get some of these extras through on time. Why, Glidden, the section bosses aren't getting time to put in new ties and properly tamp their rail-joints, the trains are running so close together."

"Don't I know it?" returned the division manager. "And our yard full of dead freight all the time. Here's the Eastern freight agent jacking me up because of the delay of these," and Glidden put a sheaf of flimsies into Ralph's willing hands.

"If you get a chance, see if you can find these cars and get them started out to-night, Fairbanks. When I called up the night yardmaster I think he went insane at hearing me suggest finding anything."

"I will see what I can do before Jack comes on at midnight," Ralph assured him. "I know the graveyard shift have got their hands full."

So this evening he called up his mother on the telephone and told her he would not be home to supper. He worked right through two complete tricks. He even went down to the yardmaster's shanty once and helped straighten out a tangle that had the gang by the ears.

Many of these things Ralph did were actually outside his proper province. But the fellow who sidesteps everything but his exact duties in rail-

roading never gets up among the "brass collars." He stays where he is put; he does not advance.

At eleven o'clock it looked as though, with the getting out a manifest and the starting of a string of empty cars east, pulled by No. 1206, the yard would be in pretty fair shape for the passage of a munition train in three sections, due about midnight.

"If we can do this, and clear 'em all by the time Jack comes down," Ralph said to his best operator, "I believe the old man will live a year longer. *Now* what's up?"

There was a rattle and a crash from somewhere down the yard; then the shriek of a steam whistle gone mad.

"It's for the wrecking crew!" declared the operator, trying to peer through the window. But he could see nothing but twinkling lights, for there was no moon.

Ralph darted for the stairway. Halfway to the roundhouse he met two men, likewise running and getting into their jumpers. They were members of the wrecking crew which, day and night, must be ready for the call to work.

"What's happened?" they shouted.

"You got me," responded Ralph, with disgust. "All I know is that it's nothing pleasant."

"Should say not!" was the rejoinder as the

outlines of a tottering bulk of locomotive loomed up just beyond the turntable. Torches were flitting about.

"What's happened now, Bragdon?" demanded Ralph sharply, recognizing the roundhouse boss carrying a torch.

"My soul and body, Mr. Fairbanks! It's Number Eight Hundred and Two. She was to pull the manifest. That dumb-headed wiper broke the record in getting up steam in her and then tried to back her out himself. He's got her half over the table and run the rear truck of the tender off the rails. Can you beat it?"

"Where is the man?" snapped Ralph. "These accidents are getting altogether too common. Mr. Glidden will want to see him."

"I'll round him up after I see this put back," groaned the boss. "What they'll do for the manifest——"

"Isn't there another engine in the shed?"

"Not a one—not that's fit to pull such a weight as that manifest."

"But there is *one?*" cried Ralph.

The man mentioned the number. The working yard boss came up. The three conferred a minute or two.

"That little old mill ain't much bigger than the yard kickers," groaned the boss, referring to the

switch engines which are known about the yards as 'kickers' or 'kettles,' or, of late years, 'tin Lizzies.' "But she'll have a good crew. And won't Jenks and Carraway load a grouch when they see what's wished on them." He went away to start his manifest train and clear the main line, west.

Ralph started back for his office, ruminating seriously. This was a bad business. Even one crippled locomotive meant delay on the division.

At the corner of a building in which tools were stored he was suddenly brought to a sharp halt. It was so black here that he could not see anything moving; but he heard a voice.

In a sibilant whisper somebody said:

"That's only the beginning. I tell you, sir, we're going to tie 'em up tighter than a bale of hay!"

CHAPTER XII

DARK WAYS

RALPH dropped to his hands and knees at the corner of the storehouse and crept softly and slowly around the turn in the path. Two figures loomed up ahead. They were walking very slowly.

"Vell," growled a second voice, its owner accepting the other person's statement without excitement, "I from Joplin am. Iss dot what you Americans say? Vell! Show me."

"Sure. Joplin is in Missouri," chuckled the first voice. "And all folks from Missouri want to be shown. I'll show you. Just wait."

"Ve vill not vait too long," said the other man, threateningly. "We have paid you money to aggomplish somet'ings—yes? Vell!"

The two passed out of hearing then. Ralph could not follow them on hands and knees, and he dared not rise to his feet for fear they might turn and catch sight of his figure against the lighter horizon.

After a minute he went on, veering toward the train dispatchers' offices, and soon reached the half-darkened stairway. Somebody had turned out the light here, and he got into the building, he knew, without being observed.

Quickly mounting to the second floor he ignored the questions of the operators on duty until he had gone to his own telephone and called the roundhouse boss with whom he had been talking only a few minutes before.

"What was the name of the wiper who dumped Number Eight Ought Two on to the cinder-path just now, Bragdon?" he demanded, when the roundhouse boss finally came to the telephone.

"Randal."

"Humph! He's no foreigner."

"His name ain't foreign," growled Bragdon. "That all? I'm busy," and he hung up.

So did Ralph. Evidently Bragdon did not know who had called him, he was so brusque. Ralph was too deeply engaged in solving the mystery of the thing to bother about the boss' impoliteness.

He was trying to place the voices of the men he had heard just now in the dark, and who had undoubtedly been discussing this accident to Locomotive No. 802.

"I don't know a man named Randal. Don't

remember that wiper at all. Could this fellow be he? Randal? Let's see what the lists say."

He drew out the pay-roll lists which he had obtained in John Glidden's name, and ran over the roundhouse employees. He knew some of them by sight—Pelly, and Driggs, and Marlow, and Feidel, and Cripps, Pfeifer, Frane, Bates——

There was a long list of them. Near the bottom, as belonging to the night crew (the wipers worked a ten-hour day at this yard) was the name "Randal, Peter." And directly following it, written in the timekeeper's hand, was the word "Schwaben."

By the tail lights on the hut at the end of the train, Ralph saw through the window the west manifest going out, pulled by No. 618. Jenks, who had not been able to get a regular trip on the division since No. 1001 had got away from him, was a good engineer, and if anybody could keep a fire in the little old engine it would be Jenks' fireman, Carraway.

They managed to get the munition trains through in good time. Just the same, Ralph hung around until long after midnight to see how much harm the ditching of one end of No. 802 really had done. If this was the beginning of little accidents in the yard, intended to cripple the division, he wanted to know it.

The fast through freight, No. 40, came along on time. This was the train on whose time the troop train had run as a special two weeks before when the enemy had tried to blow up the bridge.

No. 40 was held up for ten minutes while Yardmaster Jack Hadley cleared the main line. There was a string of cars of some kind on every track in the yard, most of the switches were clogged, and there was no chance of bringing the fast freight through on one of the other tracks. The wrecking derrick could not be moved until the rear end of No. 802 was lifted back upon the tracks.

"What's the matter with Number Thirty-two?" bawled one of the operators, sticking his head into the doorway of Ralph's office.

As long as the chief was on deck the operators refused to take any responsibility. It was up to Ralph.

"Thirty-two's the manifest that went out at 11:30. Where is she and what is she doing?"

"She's only reported at Gearing, and she's on Twenty-eight's time."

Thinking to jack Jenks up a little and make him push the old locomotive to the top notch, Ralph wrote the following question and had it sent on to the next station beyond Gearing, where there was an open key:

"Engine 618. Can't you go faster?"

Ten minutes later, just as the fast freight, No. 40, started down the yard with all clear ahead, the chuckling operator brought Ralph Jenks' answer:

"Yes; but I have to stay with the engine."

That reply added the lighter touch to an otherwise serious situation. When Ralph finally started home at two o'clock Hadley was neck deep in trouble, and No. 802 was still blocking one of the tracks.

"We don't need any pro-Germans to make mischief at this Junction," the worried young railroader told himself. "That's as sure as taxes. Altogether it looks as though Old Man Trouble had camped on our trail and was sticking right to this division."

CHAPTER XIII

JUMPING IN

THE next day Ralph advised with John Glidden about weeding out the aliens in the employ of the road.

"But, Fairbanks, I can't do that all at once," objected the supervisor. "Do you realize how hard it is to get men at all, even unskilled labor? When these fellows can go into a munition factory and pull down five and six dollars a day they don't much care to work on the G. N. for three-eighty."

"I tell you, Mr. Glidden, they are a danger. If the super wasn't ill I'd take it up with him," Ralph urged. "Now, that wiper who ran Eight-Ought-Two off the track last night—he was here under some sort of an alias—Peter Randal.

"Sounds real good, doesn't it? But he's some breed of German. His country's Prussian ruled. I bet he saw a chance to do the road dirt, and he did it."

"Well, I'll look into it," promised Glidden.

Ralph did not say anything to the manager about the brief conversation he had overheard after the derailing of the locomotive the night before. That was something for Mr. Bob Adair's private ear—if he should ever see the railroad detective again!

As the days passed, war talk and war feeling increased around the railroad yards and shops. At noontime when the gangs knocked off to dive into their dinner kettles, Ralph noticed many eager groups talking as well as eating in the shade of several sheds that lay in sight from his window.

As Ralph, who was popular with every class of worker about the division headquarters and in the yard, went among the men he heard much controversy about the policies of the Government as well as the pros and cons of the war and its measures.

Many of the younger men in the employ of the Great Northern had already been called into the National Army. Some thought the draft should have included those older than thirty-one years, for it was not yet universally understood that only the most vigorous and perfectly healthy men could endure the hardships of present-day warfare.

"And they ain't giving us fellows anything to do at all," complained one ardent patriot in Ralph Fairbanks' hearing. "I'm as good as any lad going—only I happen to have been born a year or two too early, and I got that twisted arm down at Kipper Crossing makin' a flyin' switch about five years ago. It don't bother me none, but I can't enlist because of it.

"And all kinds of foreigners are being took when I'm refused. I'm a four-ply American. Say! when I was over to that enlistment station at City Square tryin' to get the doc to pass me, you ought to have seen the foreigners they took. My soul! some of 'em didn't know their right hand from their left—in English.

"Listen," continued the excited speaker to his interested hearers. "Here was one feller that had to stand on his tiptoes to reach the measurin' mark, and he was as hairy as a goat.

"The doc was puttin' him through his paces—askin' him questions. He says to this feller: 'Any scars?' and the feller hunts in his pocket and says: 'No, meester, but I got cigareets.' What d'you know about that?"

"Never mind," said Ralph, above the laugh. "Those fellows want to fight for their Uncle Sam."

"Aw, tell us what I can do?" broke in one of a

switching crew. "I've got to stick to my job on this little old humpbacked railroad. I ain't as patriotic as a toad catching bugs in the back yard!"

"Sure you can be patriotic," Ralph declared. "Why, the very vitals of this war are in our care."

"Aw, *you* up there in your office, Mr. Fairbanks, doping out schedules, are all right——"

"And what about you switchers down here in the yard?" interrupted Ralph. "We're depending on you fellows to handle all this Government freight, aren't we? Why, the president and his advisors are just as thankful to you old rails who are vigilant and faithful in your work as they are to the generals in the army for their successes.

"We railroaders have got to put the stuff through. We've got to put it through right, and quick, and safely. There isn't a man here who can't do his bit if he wants to."

Ralph had not joined in this discussion for the mere pleasure of hearing himself talk. There were a score of men scattered around within earshot, eating their dinners. And all, he suspected, were not loyal. He watched the different faces to see what effect his words had on his hearers.

There were a few sullen countenances; but nobody raised verbal objection to what he said, save

one individual. Sam Leffert was neither foreign born, nor should he have had alien sympathies. He looked up at Ralph and grinned sourly.

"What are you doin' besides your little eight-hour trick, Fairbanks?" he asked saucily. "You'll be one of these Four-Minute Men I hear talk about—do all your war work with your mouth, eh?"

Ralph showed no vexation, only saying as he turned away: "I try to put in that eight hours faithfully, Leffert."

And the day before he had spent eighteen hours at the work! But Ralph was not boastful and self-assertive. Leffert was a slacker, had never done an honest hour's work since coming to the division, and never would.

At four o'clock that afternoon Ralph was officially released from duty. Of course, a chief dispatcher for a division seldom can claim eight hours on and sixteen off; but that is all he is paid for.

Matters were going pretty smoothly, however, and Ralph thought he would go home, have an early supper, and get a few hours' needed sleep, after which he would come down again and look over the schedules for the third trick.

He had some good operators on both the second and third tricks, and, under ordinary circum-

stances they could handle traffic all right. There was nothing special coming save a couple of coal trains which were under Government orders.

But as he came down past the roundhouse he heard some news. A freight then being made up in the yard and bound for the other end of the division, was due to start out in ten minutes. He had planned for this No. 84 Special himself.

"And the smoky can't be found!" exclaimed one of the wipers. "Williamson is sure one mad feller."

"What's the matter with Williamson?" Ralph asked.

"You know Perkins, his old side-partner, has been called to camp."

"Yes. Perkins. One of the best boys around here," agreed the chief dispatcher.

"Now you've said something," continued the wiper. "But the fireman who was to take Perkins' place hasn't shown up."

"Isn't there another fireman around?"

"Bless you, Mr. Fairbanks!" cried the man, "there isn't another crew anywhere about the Junction. Everybody's just as busy as the feller who had the seven year's itch and the dollar watch—when he wasn't scratchin' he was windin' up his watch.

"You know how this new full-crew law works,

You can't drive 'em from one trick to another. They've got to have so many hours off."

Ralph nodded and went on to where the locomotive stood panting on the main line, ready for the run. A wiper had built her fire and got steam up in her; but a fireman was needed to take No. 919 out.

She was a big freight hauler of the Pacific type, with a Vanderbilt tender and four drivers on a side, the diameter of which was fifty-four inches. A very powerful machine, indeed, and Ralph's eye brightened when he looked her over.

Of course, she was not the beauty No. 1001 had been when she steamed into Stanley Junction a few weeks before; but for a freight hauler this locomotive was, in the language of the railroader, "some mill!"

Johnny Williamson, gray-bearded and eagle-eyed, hung the upper part of his body out of his cab window and bawled for a "smoke boy."

"What's the matter with you fellers? Ain't there a tallowpot on this whole division that can come to my aid? Expect me to hold the throttle and work the signals on the left side, too? What's happened to this old road, anyway?

"There's Jim giving me the highball to come ahead," added the grouchy engineer. "What does he think I am—*twins?*"

The listeners laughed. But Ralph, although he was amused, stepped swiftly into the breach. He whispered to the wiper with whom he had been conversing, and that individual started on the run for his locker in the roundhouse.

"Hold on, Mr. Williamson," said Ralph, looking up at the engineer. "Don't blow out a cylinder-head. Let Jim wire ahead for a tallow-pot and I'll slam my shovel on Nine-Nineteen's deck till we meet up with a properly accredited fireman."

Williamson looked him over somewhat scornfully. He had not worked long on this division, and did not know Ralph well.

"Huh! You, Mr. Fairbanks?" he growled. "Well, I s'pose you'll do better than nobody. But I'll break your back 'fore we're over the ridge at Coolidge."

"That's a bet!" replied Ralph cheerfully, and turned to get into the overalls the wiper had brought him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRACK GANG

Ralph tossed his derby hat into the fireman's locker and found a greasy cap to take its place. Some of the Pacific type engines are supplied with automatic coal stokers—but not No. 919.

He knew that the firemen called Johnny Williamson "a hog for steam." He was a good engineer, and a careful one; but he had little mercy on his fireman. He could make an engine eat more coal on a hard grade than two men ought to shovel.

The roundhouse gang had laid a good fire in No. 919. Ralph gave a professional look at it, squinted at the steam clock, and began to break coal on the deck. Until they were out of the yard he would not be called upon to watch signals.

Williamson watched how the young fellow handled his slicebar, and grunted, whether in approval or not Ralph could not tell. The old man "gentled" No. 919 into action and they rolled down the yard.

The switcher had kicked the long string of heavily laden cars, section by section, out upon the main track. The caboose was toggled on behind. The crew with their lunch pails appeared. The conductor was already in his cabin at work over his waybills. The end man stood on the rear step of the caboose ready to give the engineer the sign as soon as the couplings were locked.

Williamson bumped the tender into connection cautiously, then gave it a second bump that rattled the couplings all along the train's length, and made the connections secure.

"Let 'er go!" called out the yardmaster.

Again the couplings clanged all along the train. No. 919 started, expelling a mighty blast through her chimney. The drivers revolved—slipped—then bit the iron.

Ralph grabbed the sandbox cord and dribbled a little grit along the rail on his side. The wheels gripped more firmly.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! Rumble, rumble, rumble! They were off to the ryhthmic murmur of drumming wheels.

As they passed Tower ZZ at the end of the yard, the signalman on duty hung out of a window and stared, goggle-eyed, at the sight of the chief dispatcher of the division breaking coal on the iron deck of No. 919.

Johnny Williamson was looking straight ahead now. They should have nothing but the "white board" all the way to Coolidge on the ridge, unless something unforeseen happened. The engineer settled into his seat, his left hand on the throttle. He coaxed the big machine on and on, and the steam hissed through the cylinders.

Ralph Fairbanks did not lose sight of the face of the indicator. He saw the arrow sinking.

Throwing open the firebox door, he sprayed the glowing bed of coals with a couple of shovelfuls of fuel with a skill that had not deserted him since the old days when he had fired regularly.

Almost at the bang of the closing door the arrow vibrated, then began to climb once more. The engineer let more steam into the cylinders. The arrow wobbled again.

"The boys have got old Johnny right," thought Ralph. "The more you give him the more steam he'll use. He certainly is some spendthrift with steam. If I fired for him a month, I bet I'd break him of that bad habit, old as he is!"

When they began to climb the ridge, Ralph had his hands full. It was not his first experience with an engineer who wasted steam as fast as he could make it; but the young fellow was not now in trim for this severe toil.

In the old days he had been as rugged as any

fireman on the division; but for months he had been sitting in a train dispatcher's chair, and his muscles were somewhat flabby and his wind a trifle short.

But he would not let Williamson suspect this. He fed fuel to the furnace without complaint. He made a mental note, however, to take the master mechanic into his confidence and have Williamson assigned hereafter only to engines that had stoker attachments.

"This tender holds five tons of coal, and he'll make me use it all before we're half way to terminal," muttered Ralph. "Whew! Some job!"

It really became a serious matter before Coolidge was sighted. Williamson shot the temporary fireman a glance now and then, grimly smiling at the distress of "the young boss." Like some of the other railroaders, he did not think well of a youngster like Ralph Fairbanks being advanced over older men.

The young fellow gritted his teeth and held out. But for the first time in his life he felt his heart labor and knew that he was overdoing. Since his examination by the army surgeons he could not help thinking of what they had told him about that organ.

Occasionally it skipped a beat. Then again it beat too rapidly. Just what had caused this faulty

action the doctors could not tell him without an exhaustive study of his case.

Perhaps just such severe strains as this under which he was laboring had brought about his cardiac condition. Many a fireman has broken down under the work of feeding fuel to a hard steaming locomotive. The day of universal mechanical stokers on all engines of any size is coming, and will be welcomed with joy.

Secretly Ralph hoped a regular fireman would be waiting for them at Coolidge, but no such good luck happened. Still, he would not admit how exhausted he was, and Williamson chuckled to the station master who ran out with the orders:

"'Tain't every hoghead on this division that can git a train dispatcher to fire for him. Next thing you know the president of the road will be running as skipper. Ain't war awful?"

The locomotive was steaming well when they got away from Coolidge, and Ralph certainly was thankful that after passing the plateau on the summit of the ridge there was a long descent into the next valley. She would run on wind down that slope. He could sit on the left of the boiler and "let her ride."

But as it chanced, something happened before they got to the brow of the welcome slope. Steaming around an easy curve they found a flag

between the rails. Williamson pulled his engine down easily; but his voice did not sound gentle as he said:

"Here's Denny M'Quade and his roughnecks of Section Ten. They've likely got the whole right-of-way torn up. Nice time to be mending road."

No. 919 steamed right in among the section gang, stopping with the pilot almost touching the flag staff. Denny M'Quade urged on a part of his gang in the replacement of three ties on the train's right-of-way. On the other side a number of fellows were smoothing ballast and chocking up a joint.

One of these men, out of the sight of the section boss, jumped on the cab step and grinned insinuatingly at Ralph, who was nearest.

"I say, Boss, gotta da cigareet?" he asked in the plaintive but ingratiating tone that usually comes from Southern Italy.

"Don't smoke," Ralph told him. "Nothing doing."

He scarcely glanced at the man; in fact, his attention was being held by a man working with his back to the engine, and who wielded a sledge in a masterful way.

"No smoka tobac'?" whined the supposed Italian. "Aw, pleasa, Boss!"

Something made Ralph turn and look at him again, this time carefully. He almost uttered a cry of surprise. This fellow, though well disguised by stain and dirt, was not an Italian at all.

"What's your name?" Ralph demanded sharply.

"Pietro, Boss," and he grinned.

"Zeph!"

"Sh! Don't give me away!" whispered Dallas, his grin so broad that it endangered his ears. "See that big fellow yonder?"

Ralph nodded, for the man indicated was the person swinging the sledge.

"I'm watching him. Know him?" whispered Dallas sharply. "You'd never guess."

"Jake Mund," returned Ralph, with confidence.

"Right-o! We think there's something doing. Fellows like Jake are scattered all along the division. Watch out, Fairbanks!"

With this warning the disguised Zeph swung himself down upon the ballast just as the flag was snatched away from before No. 919's pilot and Denny M'Quade cleared the right-of-way.

CHAPTER XV

BLOWN UP

FORTUNATELY the train was flagged at the foot of the hill and a fireman appeared who relieved Ralph. The young dispatcher went back on No. 19, and he was so tired that night when he reached home that there was no thought in his mind of returning to the yard to see how his schedules were working out.

He had had no opportunity of asking Zeph Dallas if he knew where Mr. Adair was hiding himself. Of course Ralph might have written to the chief detective; but he did not quite like to put down in black and white what he had to say to him.

It seemed to the young train dispatcher that the very atmosphere of his work now breathed mystery—breathed treachery, indeed! Overtired as he was when he sought his bed, his limbs only rested; his mind was alert with all that had happened since the very hour the paper torpedo with its mysterious message had been shot into his office window.

Had Otto, the half-simple boy, really written and flung that message? He could not make sure whether the note had been one of warning, or the exultation of a wicked mind that believed nothing could prevent a catastrophe at the School Street bridge.

Ralph had been keeping close watch on Otto, and had not as yet been able to make up his mind regarding him—whether or not he was a spy.

The mystery of Pringer, the paperhanger, remained a puzzle as well. That man, Ralph felt confident, had been one of the conspirators who had tried to blow up the bridge when the first troop train had gone through Stanley Junction.

No doubt of that. The fellow's interest had taken him within sight of the School Street bridge on that occasion; and immediately on the failure of the plot, he had sold out his business and disappeared.

There was Jake Mund, too. The angry German's act had almost completely wrecked the road's newest engine, No. 1001. Mr. Adair evidently believed Mund would bear watching, and had put Zeph Dallas on that job.

Of course it was Zeph's own idea to dress up like an Italian laborer and disguise himself as he had with walnut stain and dirt; but the chief detective must consider Mund an important figure

in the plot of alien employees of the Great Northern to hamper the road's effectiveness in handling Government trains.

In addition there were the two men whom Ralph had overheard talking in the dark after Peter Randal, so-called, had derailed engine No. 802. That was something Ralph Fairbanks wished very much to report to Mr. Adair.

The German, the man who admitted having paid money to the other for sabotage, might even be Pringer. Ralph was not familiar enough with the voice of the paperhanger to be sure.

As for the second fellow, the one who spoke English without an accent—— To tell the truth, from that very hour Ralph Fairbanks had been trying to place that voice in his mind!

There was the trouble over the missing fireman for No. 919 that very afternoon when Ralph had jumped in to fill the vacancy. Why was that fireman not on the job when wanted?

The young train dispatcher finally fell asleep with his mind in much turmoil over these things. He did not sleep restfully, therefore, and in the morning arose unrefreshed.

He was muscle-sore, too. That experience on the deck of No. 919 showed Ralph how completely out of condition he had grown. Months of physical inactivity had left him unable to endure any

particular strain. There was a certain lameness in the locality of his heart. What the doctors had told him began secretly to influence the young fellow's mind.

He did not fail, however, to be cheerful in his mother's presence. Naturally he had been obliged to tell her something of his experience the previous afternoon, for he had arrived home looking more like a coal heaver than a train dispatcher. He did not let her suspect how heavy the task had been.

"I can't be thinking of myself all the time," he thought, as he rode to town on this morning. "That will get me nowhere. I'll hunt out the old Indian clubs and dumbbells and take half an hour in the morning to get into condition. Gee! how a fellow can fall off when he neglects proper exercise."

He went swiftly to the door of his own office and opened it, perhaps more quietly than usual. At least, Otto Smith, who was in the smaller room, did not at first hear him.

The German lad stood on a chair in front of the big map of the Great Northern System and seemed to be studying a certain point on the Mountain Division, his forefinger pressed against the map as he closely read the print.

Ralph banged the door. "Huh?" ejaculated

Otto, throwing a startled glance over his shoulder.

Seeing Ralph, he staggered, tried to descend quickly from the chair, and managed to overturn it. He came to the floor with a crash.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the chief dispatcher. "You're a regular tumbleheels, Otto."

"Ja, ja!" agreed the confused Otto. He set the chair upright, picked up his broom and brush, and limped out of the room.

"Now, why could he have been so interested in that map?" Ralph muttered. "What place was he squinting at?"

He started for the map himself; but just then one of the operators came in with a bunch of flimsies and the work of the day began. Ralph forgot about Otto for the time being.

Each day saw the volume of freight business piling up for the Great Northern. This was before the Government had decided to commandeer the principal railroad lines and run them in combination.

The heads of the various systems were, without doubt, doing their very best to expedite matters. But frictions and jealousies of long standing could not be easily overcome, and there was no harmony between the various interests.

Competition was a specter that stood in the way of hundred per cent. efficiency in all branches; particularly in the handling of freight. Special rates to favored shippers, although often in opposition to interstate commerce laws, was still a general practice at many freight headquarters.

Then the Government officials' demand for preference for certain shipments often completely knocked out Ralph's nicely made-up schedules for hours ahead.

Special trains were thrown suddenly on to his division to get around some freight blockade on one main line or the other. On this particular forenoon a series of three trains of supplies for the Ordnance Department of the Army was unexpectedly shifted from the Southern Line to the G. N.'s Mountain Division.

These supplies had to be put through, no matter if fast passenger traffic was delayed. Ralph worked for two hours rearranging his schedule of traffic up to four in the afternoon, so as to adjust matters to this sudden need.

He was proud of the new schedule at that. With no untoward accident he could put through the ordnance trains and clear all his regular passenger and freight trains at approximately their usual times.

Indeed, these three ordnance trains reported at

Rockton and cleared for the run over his division by one o'clock. Everything was going swimmingly, and Ralph was about to go out to lunch.

Suddenly there was an explosion of voices in the outer office. Ralph had no sounder in his room; merely a telephone. He could not catch the telegraph messages "on the fly," as the others could.

His door banged open and John Glidden, his face pale and set, appeared.

"Fairbanks, they've done it!" he gasped.

"Who's done what?" demanded the chief dispatcher.

"They've got the McMillan Chasm bridge! Blown up! West-bound Seventy-three has just passed over! The ordnance trains are dished!"

"Great heavens! Section one would have been there in ten minutes," groaned Ralph. "Anybody hurt?"

"No. Not even a track walker on the bridge. But a whole span is blown out. Why, man, it will take days to repair it!"

"Keep your head, Glidden," advised the young dispatcher. "This is a bunch of trouble sure enough. And the super being absent, it's up to us. Those ordnance trains will have to be attended to first of all. Hadn't you better get Jerry Madden on the job? Rush him over there to

McMillan and let him see what is needed and how long it will take to make repairs."

"But there'll have to be blue prints made—and all. It's awful!" declared John Glidden. "Where the dickens was Adair and his police? It must have been a Hun plot."

He stormed out of the room. Ralph sat still at his desk for a full minute, thinking.

Then he got up and crossed the room to the railroad map. He did as Otto had done—got on a chair the nearer to see the markings on the diagram.

There was the smutty print of Otto's forefinger right at the point in which he had been so deeply interested.

That point was McMillan Chasm—the very spot where the railroad bridge had been blown up!

CHAPTER XVI

THE WORK TRAIN

ASTONISHED as Ralph Fairbanks was by this last discovery, he could give Otto's interest in the McMillan Chasm bridge but brief attention at the moment.

He knew the wires would be hot with messages regarding the trains stalled by the blowing up of the bridge. And first of all he had to consider the three Government trains, haste in the movement of which was imperative.

Ralph got into touch with the chief dispatchers of the other divisions of the Great Northern System. This was an occasion when all must pull together, and pull their very best!

During the next two hours schedules were torn to pieces and new records in handling trains at the several wyes were established.

The Government trains had to be turned back to the main stem from which they had been shifted. The blockade which had held them up was straightened out in short order—by the crass

method of leaving several loaded cars in the ditch along the right-of-way!

The unimportant freights on the Mountain Division would have to wait on the sidings and in the yards at different points, to get through in either direction, until after the bridge was repaired. First-class passenger traffic must go around the division altogether, and preferred freight as well. The local passenger trains could run up to the Chasm on either side, where the Traffic Master must arrange for the transportation of the passengers from one waiting train to the other.

Jerry Madden, the system's very best bridge builder, was on the scene with a gang and material was being rushed to him before Ralph's first trick was finished at four o'clock.

The blockade, after the first excitement was over, relieved Ralph of a good deal of work for the time being. Glidden needed him, for the manager of the division was inclined to lose his head slightly when matters became complicated.

Ralph could foresee the yard at Stanley Junction, as well as the other yards along the division, crammed with freight while the bridge was down at McMillan Chasm. It would take days, if not weeks, to clear the line.

And how long would Jerry Madden be rebuild-

ing the wrecked bridge? According to report, a full span had been blown out, and it might be that the structure was seriously shaken for its entire length.

The wires were alive with messages speeding back and forth about the accident. The railroad police, as well as the sheriff of the county, were combing the vicinity of the Chasm for the criminals who had done the deed.

The explosives used, the authorities believed, were TNT and dynamite, and must have been brought from a distance. Indeed, it was possible that munition workers at the Proberst factories might be involved in the deed, for where else could the TNT have come from?

The charges had been laid under the structure at the eastern end, and the ends of the steel beams had been lifted bodily from the stone sill of the bridge, the span being cast, a tangled mass of twisted girders, into the chasm.

"It must be one awful mess!" groaned John Glidden to his young friend, when the worst was known at Stanley Junction.

"Well, we know it all now," Ralph said cheerfully. "And the super being off the job, it's up to us, Mr. Glidden, to push the repair work as rapidly as possible. What have you wired Jerry Madden?"

"I told him to go ahead and do all he can. Of course, it will be at least twenty-four hours before the engineers' office can supply him with a set of working plans. About all he can do is to clear away the débris and get ready to use the new material as fast as it arrives."

"I wonder if that will please Jerry," Ralph said thoughtfully.

"How do you mean that?"

"He's old-fashioned, you know," Ralph replied. "He was building bridges when the G. N. was a single streak of rust through what was then the wilderness. He hates to be hampered by architects and such new-fangled things."

"But the man can't build his bridge without directions for doing so!" gasped Glidden. "He'll have to wait in this case until he gets his material. And he can't get much of that until we know what the plans call for. No man can work haphazard."

Ralph chuckled. "I have heard of some of the things Jerry has done in the past. Although he may not have worked haphazard, he has certainly performed stunts to make your eyes open."

"I hope the old fellow won't lose his head," Glidden said anxiously. "I do wish, Fairbanks, that you'd run over to McMillan and see personally just what is being done and what the pros-

pect is for getting trains through. Do you suppose you can?"

"Yes. I can go to-night. You know, my own end of it is almost dead," Ralph returned without much hesitation. "I can get over on a gasoline track-speeder if no train happens to be going up there to-night."

"If you will!" exclaimed the much-worried division manager.

Ralph went over the schedules again before going home, making sure that there were no loose ends. The local trains were running as usual, of course, only as far as the Chasm from the Junction; but the operators on duty could manage all the traffic that was likely to go over the division that night.

He hurried through his supper, telling his mother meanwhile of the difficulty the road was in and what John Glidden wished him to do.

"I do hope you'll get into no danger, Ralph," she said. "It seems that trouble is all about us. One would think that the war was so far away that it would not touch us——"

"The war is right here!" he interposed, with emphasis. "We've got to fight the enemy right in our midst."

"Oh, dear! I am expecting something to happen to you every day," she murmured.

"Something does. I manage to get three square meals and some sleep in every twenty-four hours, and that's something, I should hope. Lucky I am to get so much these times! Now, I'm off again."

"Where, to-night, Ralph?" she asked.

"I'm going over the line to see the wrecked bridge. You know, Mr. Glidden is worried, as usual, and I want to relieve his mind by personally seeing what can be done to speed up the work."

He kissed her and hurried away. He meant to go to the dispatchers' office for a moment before starting on his trip over the division, and so crossed the yard in that direction.

It was in the darkest corner near the foot of the stairs that he was suddenly halted. He heard guttural voices just beyond his station; two people; and they were not speaking English!

The mere fact that this language he heard was undoubtedly German was not startling, but it was suspicious because the men were loitering here in the dark.

He moved forward warily. The pale and flickering light of the single gas jet burning at the foot of the stairs aided not at all in the illumination of this patch of cinders outside the door of the building.

Suddenly Ralph stepped upon a shingle, or some other small piece of board, and it creaked. At that moment, too, an engine began to whistle sharply down the yard.

One of the persons he had overheard talking broke away and his heavy shoes pounded over the cinders as he ran down the yard.

Ralph saw something moving before him and he pounced upon the object. He clutched a struggling, squealing youth whose identity he immediately guessed.

"Come on in here, Otto!" he commanded, and dragged the German boy into the narrow hall at the foot of the stairway. "Who was that with you?"

"Who—mit *me?*" gasped Otto.

"If you try to lie to me you'll be punished severely," Ralph threatened. "Who was the man?"

"P-Peter," stammered the boy.

Ralph's thought flashed to the memory of the wiper who, like Otto's Uncle Jake, had wrecked a locomotive and then run away.

"Peter Randal?"

"*Ja.* Peter Ran-*dal,*" said Otto.

"Where did he go?" demanded Ralph somewhat sharply.

"On the vork train," muttered Otto, waving his

hand to indicate the direction of the whistling engine.

"The train that is bound for the place where the bridge was wrecked to-day?"

In the semi-darkness Ralph saw Otto bobbing his head furiously in the affirmative.

"What's Peter Randal doing on that train?"

"Peter iss von of de new gang dot vass hired yet dis efening. Dey help build de pridge up again."

"Belongs to that new crew, does he?" muttered Ralph. "Joined on under an assumed name, I bet."

Then he seized Otto suddenly in a firmer grasp and shook him a little.

"You are about my height," he said. "Off with your jacket and trousers! Give me that cap!" and he snatched the latter article from Otto's head. "I am going to change clothes with you."

"Mit *me?*" gasped the other.

"Yes. Get a move on!" for Ralph was already stripping off his own outer garments. He removed the contents of his pockets. Otto did as he was told, murmuring protests all the time.

"I can't work in these togs of mine," Ralph explained. "I'm going with that gang. You take care of my suit, Otto. And I shall want to talk

with you when I get in to-morrow morning."

He ran out, buttoning Otto's coat across his chest as he did so. It was rather a tight fit, and the arms of the jacket and the legs of the trousers were too short. They were, however, serviceable working clothes.

The locomotive of the work train had ceased summoning the gang. She suddenly began to puff, and her trucks rattled over a switch on to the main track. She had started.

Ralph redoubled his efforts to reach the tail-lights on the battered caboose at the end of the short train. But the wheels turned faster and faster and the lights receded swiftly. He realized that he was left behind.

CHAPTER XVII

A RUNAWAY

For once there were plenty of locomotives in the roundhouse stalls. Ralph Fairbanks might have ordered one fired up and followed the work train to McMillan on a special.

But he did not wish to attract any more attention than was necessary. He had changed garments with Otto so as to look the part of a laborer, and he intended to join the gang on the work train.

Without attracting a good deal of attention he could not wire ahead to stop the train. But he knew of other means to carry out his intention of joining the crew.

Half a mile outside the yard, and at the foot of the rise to Coolidge, the boss of Section One had his cottage and toolshed. Ralph knew that Gallagher's son, Pat, had a track-speeder, or railroad motorcycle, which he kept in the shed.

So he continued to run as fast as he could over the cinder path between the tracks, and, without

meeting a soul whom he knew, he at length reached the cottage of the section boss. He was completely winded when he arrived, and long since the tail lights of the work train had winked out of sight.

Gallagher came to the door himself, and had difficulty in identifying the division's chief dispatcher in Otto's clothes.

"Bliss us and save us, Misther Ralph!" he ejaculated, "phat be yez doin' massacreradin' in thim overalls? Is ut Ahl Saints' Eve, I dunno?"

"This is no Hallowe'en camouflage," Ralph assured him, sitting down on the step for a moment to catch his breath. "I want to get up the line, and that rattler that just went through escaped me."

"Billy Blunt's gang, d'ye mean?"

"Is Blunt the boss of those roughnecks? I want to reach him and go on to McMillan."

"Sure, that was a bad business up there, they do be tellin' me," urged Gallagher, wagging his head. "These Germans! I niver did have no use for 'em."

"I am anxious to overtake Blunt's crew," Ralph said quickly. "Will you let me take Pat's speeder?"

"Shure, is that what yez want, Misther Ralph? In a minute," declared Gallagher, hurrying into

his cottage to get the key of the toolshed.

In a few moments they had the light but strongly constructed motor car out on the main track. Ralph knew how to run the machine. He made sure that there was gasoline enough and that it was all ready for use.

"Just leave her with any siction foreman along the division; any wan of them will take care of the bye's scooter," said Gallagher. "They all know me."

"I'll take good care of it," promised Ralph.

After a blast or two, the machine began to chug easily up the slant of the ridge. Settling himself firmly in the driver's seat, Ralph coaxed up the speed until the machine was fairly humming over the rails.

He climbed the ridge swiftly, and, knowing that there was nothing ahead of him but the work train, felt perfect confidence in the safety of his trip. The little stations he passed were closed, and only the switch targets gleamed. At length he came in sight of the lamps of Coolidge, which crowned the ridge.

There was an operator still on duty at the station and a signalman in the tower just beyond. The targets were white, however, and Ralph rolled past at top speed.

Beyond the town were several mills and fac-

tories and the sidings to these were now choked with dead freight trains thrown back by the blockade.

It was along here, on Section Ten, that Zeph Dallas had been working with Denny McQuade's gang the afternoon Ralph had fired for Johnny Williamson on No. 919. Ralph wondered now what had become of Zeph, and if he was still sticking to the German, Jake Mund.

Just at the brow of the hill which pitched into the next valley, Ralph saw six loaded box cars on a siding. He thought he saw a figure cross the tracks by the switch target, and he pulled down on his speed.

He was still moving quite rapidly as he passed the string of box cars, straining his eyes to spy the man whom he thought he had previously seen.

Suddenly there was a flash in the shadow of the last car and above the noise of his machine Ralph heard the explosion of a pistol. The wind of the passing bullet fairly fanned his cheek.

Naturally he ducked. Of course he was frightened. Who would not be at such an unexpected and dastardly attack?

He threw the control wide open and the speeder fairly leaped ahead. There was a second pistol shot from the same shadow; but the bullet went

wide. He caught a glimpse of two men running out from beside the car.

As he flashed past the target he was aware that the switch was set for the cars to roll out upon the main track. But he presumed that they were safely braked. The siding was just over the pitch of the hill and if the brakes were loosed the cars would be carried by gravitation out upon the main track.

Ralph was both puzzled and frightened by the unexpected attack. He could not understand it.

Surely those fellows had not been two of Mr. Adair's guards. Why, indeed, should anybody wish to stop anyone who was going peaceably about his business on this little car?

"There is something on the docket that I know nothing about," he told himself. "How widespread is this plotting against the Great Northern?

"If they blew up the McMillan bridge this noon, what do they propose doing to-night? Is there something going to be pulled off back there on the ridge that the police should look into?"

He shut off his engine and let the speeder ride. Turning, he tried to peer up the track to see if he could see any further movement at the siding.

He could really see nothing. Not even a signal light at this distance. It was a long run to the

first tower from which he could send a message. And who should he send it to, and what should he say? He did not know just then how to reach Mr. Adair quickly.

Braking the machine carefully, he brought it to a complete halt, perhaps a mile below the scene of the attack. Far down the hill he heard the tooting of the locomotive drawing the work train which he was desirous of overtaking.

"Well, I can't linger here," he muttered. "I want to catch Blunt and his crew, and I can do that long before they get to the bottom of this grade. Here goes——"

As he turned to start his engine again he heard a sudden rumble of wheels. It could not be the work train, for that was much too far away to telegraph the faintest tremor back through the iron.

Ralph glanced over his shoulder again in suspicion. The vibration of the rails had its source above him. He was on the time of no regular train, he knew right well. The local passenger leaving the Junction at ten-thirty would be the next train in this direction, and that was more than an hour and a half away.

The jar of thundering wheels increased. Faster and faster they turned. It was a cloudy night; but behind the haze was a small moon,

and suddenly through a rift in this haze the moon appeared.

Its faint, silvery light made objects on the hill above Ralph Fairbanks distinguishable, in part at least, for an instant. There was something moving up there at the brow of the hill.

One, two, three, four, five, six—— Six huge, lumbering bodies pitched in succession over the brow of the ridge and moved slowly down the main track. The rumbling increased momentarily, and Ralph felt for the instant a sudden sickness in the pit of his stomach—a feeling that had nothing whatever to do with his heart. He had quite forgotten now the warning of the medical men regarding that organ. All personal consequences were put out of his mind.

What should he do? Those six loaded box cars had been started out of the siding and were running wild down the mountainside! And below, jogging on peacefully and unsuspiciously, was Billy Blunt's work train with his crew, bound for the wrecked bridge at McMillan Chasm!

CHAPTER XVIII

CHASED

In thirty seconds Ralph Fairbanks could have lifted the gasoline track speeder off the rails and set it out of danger. A mile behind was coming a Juggernaut, thought of which might have made the bravest soul tremble.

How the string of six heavily laden cars had been started, and for what purpose the barbarous act had been performed, occupied little of Ralph's thought. It was what the runaway might do before it reached the bottom of the hill that obsessed his mind.

His engine started, and the explosions were regular. Merely releasing the brake had set the machine off at a rapid pace. Now he opened wide the throttle and the speeder whizzed down the first straight stretch of track.

His idea was to outdistance the runaway and overtake the work train in season to warn Foreman Billy Blunt of what was coming.

Had Ralph thought more of his own safety

than he did of the safety of others, he might have delayed long enough to lift his machine over to the other set of rails and so be off the actual track of danger. Precious seconds, however, would have been lost thereby.

He well knew that the heavy freight cars, once under way, would gain speed at every revolution of the wheels. Fast as the gasoline motor was, the runaway would soon be traveling two yards to his one.

Without a light and with no hand at the released brakes, the wild train trailed him down the slope, faster and faster. Ralph racked his brain to remember the topography of this stretch of mountainside.

There was no level on which the runaway would come to a stop, or be even retarded in its wild plunge—that he knew. And as far as Ralph could remember there was not a siding into which the flying cars could be turned until the valley was reached.

There was not a chance of ditching the thundering train of box cars on that long and deadly incline!

As for sending a message ahead to warn the work train crew—he had already figured out the impossibility of that. Not a flag station would be open between this spot and Tower LM just

this side of Valley Stream, which was fifty-odd miles away.

The slowly moving work train would not reach the bottom of the incline at its usual rate of speed before it was rammed by the runaway. Her crew had to be warned!

The gasoline car had leaped down the rails like an arrow the moment Ralph had opened her up, and he had to lean hard to the left as it rounded the first curve to keep the wheels on the track. The curve was not sufficiently sharp, however, to jump the runaway freight cars.

The latter came roaring on through the wooded track above like a cyclone. Had the men on the work train been on the watch for such a chaser they must have already apprehended the threatening peril.

Ralph could imagine, however, just the situation on Blunt's train. The car first behind the engine was the dormitory, or, as the railroaders termed it, "the roughneck Pullman."

The laborers would have turned into the bunks almost to a man, to get a few hours' sleep before being set to work on the rebuilding of the bridge at McMillan. Blunt himself, and perhaps a sleepy brakeman, might be in the little caboose at the end of the train, the rattling of the wheels of which would drown all outside sounds.

"It's up to me to reach 'em and tell the engineer to crack on speed," Ralph decided. "Nothing else can save 'em from being bumped."

He had made many a speedy flight over the line since first he had begun working on the Great Northern, but even his phenomenal run on the road's crack express train, which is described in "Ralph on the Overland Express," had never equaled the speed of this little gasoline scooter. He seemed to be actually falling down the mountainside.

The road was well ballasted and the rail-ends perfectly matched. The wheels of the speeder slid along with scarcely a jar.

Had there been any obstruction on the track the young fellow could not have saved himself. If the machine had stopped suddenly, he would have kept right on, being thrown as from a catapult into the air.

Fortunately the track was for the most part straight. Thick woods on either hand and outcropping boulders beside the right of way made it difficult to see far ahead, even in daylight. Now Ralph was almost completely blinded by the darkness and by the wind of his own swift passage.

Now and again there flashed into sight the target lights at a wayside station. Nobody seemed

to be awake at these cabins. He passed them like a streak.

And louder and louder in his ears roared the thunder of the runaway's approach. It was like some horrid nightmare chasing him through the night. He could not see it, but its voice deafened him. The sweat of fear stood out upon his face as he bent over the handlebars of the speeder.

The mechanism was throbbing at top speed; yet he realized that the weight of the six cars in his rear was driving them faster and faster. It would not be many moments before they must overtake the light motor car.

Ahead he caught the gleam of a red spark, then a second, red lamps eerily flickering in the gloom. Ralph realized that they were the tail-lights of the work train.

At last! The red pinpoints fairly leaped toward him, so it seemed. The speeder would crash into the rear of the caboose in another thirty seconds.

Those thirty seconds were about the most nerve-racking of Ralph Fairbanks' life. He was in deadly peril, and he well knew it. If he smashed into the buffer of the caboose he might not live to tell Billy Blunt of the hounding terror of the runaway freight cars.

He reversed his engine and braked. Blue

flames were sprayed from beneath his wheels on either hand. If Blunt had been wide awake, he must have seen the scintillation through the open door of the caboose.

But both the foreman and the brakeman in the caboose were dozing. They had not yet heard the thundering wheels of the runaway. They were utterly unconscious of the terror in pursuit.

The light car almost buckled, Ralph braked so fiercely. Sliding along the rails it bumped lightly into the rear of the caboose. The young fellow released the brake and leaped.

He came within an ace of falling between the speeder and the drawhead of the caboose; but he managed to scramble up on the narrow platform.

The coil of spare bellcord hung upon a hook outside the caboose door and even as Ralph shouted to the dozing men within, he seized the loop of the cord and lassoed the handlebar of Patsy Gallagher's speeder. He did not want to lose the little car under the pounding wheels of the runaway.

The foreman and the brakeman came to their feet at Ralph's yell and popped their heads out of the door like twin jacks-in-a-box. They heard the coming freight then—it could not be mis-

taken. Although they could not see it, the runaway seemed fairly upon them.

"What's that? Who are you?" yelled Blunt, grabbing Ralph by the shoulder.

"What's coming down the hill after us?" demanded the brakeman. "Let me out o' this!"

"Don't jump!" commanded the foreman of the work crew. "What's broke loose?" he repeated, shaking the young train dispatcher.

Because of some break in the forest and a sudden lightening of the sky, the plunging freight cars appeared dimly, and not many rods behind.

"She's running wild!" shouted Blunt. "What is it?"

"Six box cars! Loaded!" explained Ralph, getting his breath again. "They've chased me clear down the hill! Out of the way, Blunt! We've got to tell the engineer, or we'll be smashed."

He leaped through the doorway between the two men. There was an iron ladder into the cupola and Ralph swarmed up this rapidly.

Out through the window he crawled and over the roof to that of the next car, which was the tool car. Beyond that he had to swing himself down on the flat car which bore the derrick.

There was a watchman here who yelled at him; but Ralph flew by without stopping to explain and dashed into the end door of the sleeper. A

lantern burned dimly here, and everybody was asleep. As he ran through the young fellow uttered a yell that would have awakened the dead.

He burst through the forward door and sprang upon the tender. He could hear the roaring train close behind above the rumbling of the work train's wheels. The engineer and firemen looked back and saw Ralph's figure gyrating between them and the skyline.

"Speed up! Speed up!" cried the young fellow. "There's a train running wild behind! Speed up!"

Would the engineer *never* understand him? Ralph staggered along the runway, waving his arms and yelling at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRAIL OF THE TRAITORS

PERHAPS the engineer of the work train caught a glimpse of the pursuing runaway. At least, he seemed to understand something of the peril which threatened. He opened his throttle without waiting for Ralph to reach the cab and sent his train careening down the slope at a pace which, in itself, threatened to derail it, without assistance from the runaway freight cars.

This increased pace, however, did not breed assurance that the work train would not be rammed by the runaway. The speed of the latter was terrific.

The chance for escape of the work train was, however, far and away better than had been that of the little gasoline speeder on which Ralph had made his wild trip thus far down the mountainside. The young train dispatcher fully realized that.

The weight of this train added to the pulling power of the locomotive gave at once a speed of forty miles or more an hour.

The engineer whistled for brakes to be released, and the brakeman, Billy Blunt himself, and the watchman on the derrick car, jumped to obey the order. The release of the brakes could be felt instantly. Away shot the work train toward the valley, the locomotive at top speed with all the push of the train behind it.

The pace threatened to rattle the bolts out of the old locomotive. Ralph had to cling to the fireman's seat with both hands. The fireman had difficulty in keeping his footing on the deck. The engineer hung on and looked back instead of forward. The train was itself all but running wild.

The freight cars were now so close that the roar of their wheels was deafening. The engine crew had to make signs to each other; their voices were completely drowned.

But the engineer opened the whistle and tied it down. Its shriek might be heard in the valley. Ralph, turning to look ahead, saw, in spite of the blinding light of the headlight playing on the rails, the sparkle of more than one light in the distance. It was a glimpse of Valley Stream. If they could pass Tower LM, and the signalman was awake, the runaway might be ditched without doing any harm.

Besides, if the work train could gather speed enough it would not so much matter if she was

bumped lightly by the runaway. If the weight of the six loaded cars struck a slowly moving object, however, or struck any stationary body——

"Good-*night!*" cried Ralph Fairbanks, at the thought. "We'd be knocked galley-west."

The uncertainty of what was going to happen endured but for a few moments, it was true. But that run to the bottom of the slope was a nerve-stretching experience. None of them was soon to forget it.

The runaway was right on the heels of the caboose when the work train hit the level. For a mile or more the uncertainty of the outcome continued. The heavily loaded cars had gathered such momentum in their flight down the incline that the locomotive could barely keep the work train ahead.

They whirled past Tower LM at last. The runaway was sagging back a little by that time. The signalman had opened a switch into a siding for the work train and when it was in the clear, closed the switch and allowed the runaway to thunder along the main track.

The work train came to a stop as the six loaded cars roared by. They would not immediately come to a standstill.

"Break us off and I'll run down and get them,"

said the engineer to his fireman. "We can't be blocked here by those reefers. And there'll be a passenger along here some time. We want to keep off her time."

He whistled for an open switch ahead and got it. The peril was over, and at once the old railroader regained his self-control. But Ralph still felt "wabbly" in his knee-joints.

"Some little run—what?" suggested the fireman, as he started to uncouple the tender from the workmen's sleeper.

Ralph went with him and stepped aboard the dormitory, there to meet the clamorous crew of laborers who had been fairly shaken out of their bunks by the pitching and rolling of the car.

Billy Blunt, red-faced, came through from the rear. He stared at Ralph in wonder and surprise.

"Who are you?" he demanded, scratching his head. "And how under the canopy of the sky did you board us? From an aeroplane, I dunno?"

"From Patsy Gallagaher's gasoline speeder," Ralph explained, seeing with satisfaction that he was not recognized by the boss, nor by any of the other men.

He was secretly scrutinizing them all, for he expected to find Peter Randal here. He had long since gained a description of the missing wiper

from the roundhouse boss, and when he saw a tall, light-haired man with a scar over his right eye and another on his cheek bone, he knew he had found his man.

He went on to repeat to the wondering boss and the others how he had seen the six cars start down the incline after he had passed them on the siding in the little speeder; but he did not mention the pistol shot that had been fired twice at him from the shadow of the freight cars.

"But what was you after?" demanded Blunt.

"Thought I might get a job with you. I hear you are short of men," Ralph replied mendaciously. "Take me on your crew, Boss?"

"Why, I guess so," Blunt agreed, still staring at him in a puzzled way.

"Then I want to see what's happened to Patsy's speeder," Ralph observed, starting for the rear again. "I must get somebody along here to take care of it until it can be returned."

Billy Blunt followed him. The boss evidently was not satisfied entirely with Ralph's explanation. "I ought to know you," he said, when they reached the caboose.

The brakeman had got down to run back to the tower with his lantern. The train dispatcher and the labor boss were alone.

"Never mind who I am, Mr. Blunt," the for-

mer told him. "I had to make sure you had a man in your crew—that tall fellow with the scars on his face."

"What th—— Who are you?" demanded Blunt again. "One of Bob Adair's fly-boys? What you houndin' my men for? You don't want a job, then?"

Ralph passed over most of these questions. "I want to be considered as a member of your crew for the time being. I won't stir up any rumpus. But who's the man I described?"

Blunt fished out his time book and looked down the list. "That's Scalen. It is the name he goes by, anyway."

"It's not his name. I don't know what his real name is," admitted Ralph. "But watch him, Mr. Blunt. He turned a trick when he was working in the yard at the Junction that put us wise to him. Watch him."

"I'd fire him, only labor's scarce. And this bridge business——"

"I know. You want all the hands you can get."

"And I thought I had another in you," went on the foreman. "You fooled me."

"Let the men think I am one of your gang," urged Ralph. "And keep an eye on that Scalen, as you call him. He has a German face."

"Sure! does that condemn a man?" cried the foreman.

"It comes pretty near doing so in his case," Ralph assured him. "He never honestly owned the name he is using now, and I believe he was under an alias when he worked in the Junction roundhouse. So don't trust him."

"Well, sir, after what happened at McMillan this day I'm thinkin' we've got to watch everybody. 'Tis true. The dirty scalawags! And it's only the off-scourings of humanity you can hire on labor crews now, believe me!"

Ralph examined the speeder that had trailed the caboose on to this siding. It seemed to have escaped injury. It would not have surprised him if the little car had jumped the track and been smashed to bits along the right of way.

He borrowed a lantern from the caboose and wheeled the speeder back as far as the tower, where he lifted it from the rails. The brakeman came down out of the tower to ask questions and the signalman hung out of his window to listen.

All that Ralph told them he had already repeated to Billy Blunt. How the train of six heavy box cars had been started down the mountainside was a puzzle.

"Hoboes," declared the brakeman, who had no

love for the fraternity of "free riders." "They are always up to some mischief."

"It came near costing the road a pretty penny. And on top of that blow-up at McMillan," said the signalman. "These things look suspicious."

Ralph nodded, but said nothing further. He wished heartily the superintendent was on his feet again. He meant to suggest to him, when he was well, that a circular letter be addressed to all faithful employees of the road urging them to be particularly watchful of foreign-born men at the present time.

That there was an organized band of traitors to the railroad and to the Government at work along the Great Northern, the young chief dispatcher of the division was sure.

The rattling of the freight car couplings from along the line informed the trio at the tower that the engineer had gone after the runaway train and was bringing it in. He pulled the six cars in upon the siding, meanwhile pushing his own train back on the main track.

"It don't bother me none," remarked the brakeman. "I'm actin' as tail-ender," and he pointed to the red lamp set down between the rails. "Somebody else can screw them brakes up."

And somebody evidently did so when the

engine broke away from the runaway. The six cars were safe on the siding. The engineer began whistling for the flagman to come in.

Ralph had meanwhile arranged with the signalman to let him lock the speeder into the tool-room under the tower. Then he followed the brakeman with his lantern back to the caboose.

"Come on, boys; we got to get a hump on us," Billy Blunt declared. "We'll be on the time of that passenger local before we know it."

The brakeman swung his lantern to show that all was clear, and they started.

"Not much sleep for my boys to-night. We ought to be at McMillan by one o'clock," the foreman said. "I wonder how far along Jerry Madden has got, anyway."

"He can't do much but clear up the mess until he hears from the engineers' office, can he?" Ralph asked curiously.

Blunt began to chuckle. "Jerry is one of them fellers that never found the word 'can't' in the dictionary. Tell him he can't do a thing, and like as not he'll do it."

"I know he's a regular 'miracle man,'" admitted Ralph. "I've heard my father speak of him."

"And who might your father be?" asked the foreman, eying Ralph curiously.

"Oh, he used to work for the G. N. in the old days," responded Ralph noncommittally.

Blunt would doubtless have asked more questions, only the brakeman was in the way. He was anxious to know about Ralph—who and what he was.

The young dispatcher, however, was not minded to satisfy the foreman's curiosity. It was enough that he had warned Blunt to watch the fellow called Scalen. Until Ralph had conferred with Mr. Adair about the man who was known while working in the roundhouse as "Peter Randal," he did not purpose to go into further particulars with others.

He stretched out in one of the bunks in the caboose and tried to sleep. Not until then did he give up to the exhaustion following his recent exertions. His activities of the past two hours had been enough to exhaust any one, whether he had a systolic murmur in the cardiac region or not.

"Believe me!" he thought, "I don't know just what those fellows in the training camps have to go through, but if it's anything worse than I have been through to-night, they have my sympathy. Bah! The doctors are all Old Betties, I do believe."

They climbed higher into the hills. As they

clattered through certain yards they passed long strings of stalled freight cars waiting for the blown-up bridge to be repaired. Ralph could see some of these through the narrow light over his bunk.

Each train measured at least six hundred tons, and there were at least twenty of them. Never before had he obtained such a concrete idea of the volume of business that was going over the Mountain Division at the present time.

And every hour's delay at McMillan Chasm was adding to the blockade!

"If Mr. Glidden had come out here over the division himself, instead of sending me," Ralph thought, "he certainly would have been flabbergasted by the sight of so much delayed freight. It does look as though we'd never be able to get the division clear after this."

The work train began to slow down. Surely they were not so near their destination?

"What under the jumping juniper bush is the matter now?" groaned Billy Blunt, jumping suddenly, wide awake, from his chair.

He went out on the platform and tried to peer ahead along the slowly jouncing train.

"Looks like there was something on the iron ahead of us, Boss," drawled the brakeman, craning his neck on the other side.

"My landy! I thought we had the white board all along the division. What's the matter with the train dispatcher's office? Or has some somnambulist of a hogger blundered in on the main?"

They crawled past the tower at Windham. Blunt yelled to a man with a lantern beside the track:

"What's doing? Why the funeral procession?"

"Why, Boss, the iron is clogged from here to the Chasm, I reckon, with rattlers," said the stranger. "They commenced moving up an hour ago. They're running head to tail for miles an' miles, they tell me. That pair o' tail lights you can see up there is on the last string that was stalled here at Windham when the bridge blowed up."

"D'you hear *that?*" yelled Billy Blunt. "What kind of a bonehead play is that? We'll never get to McMillan past this blockade."

Ralph bounded out of his bunk. He realized that something must, of course, have gone dead wrong!

CHAPTER XX

EVIDENCE

THE train continued to fairly crawl along. What was going on up ahead Ralph could not imagine. Although the regular schedule was shot to pieces, he knew that the operators he had left in charge at Stanley Junction were better informed than to jam this delayed freight up against the Chasm before there was any chance of its going across.

Besides, they must be informed of the time of the work train which should have had a clear track to the scene of the disaster. And here would come along the passenger local, as well, out of the Junction at 10:30, to get all balled up with these freight trains.

In spite of the fact that he was traveling in disguise, Ralph was tempted to get out and connect with a key where he could ask questions and send orders. He fairly itched to learn what was doing, and what it was all about.

Was some enemy of the road and of the Gov-

ernment able to do this for the purpose of tying up the G. N., or this division of it, worse than it already was tied?

He asked a few questions of the brakeman, and found that there was not likely to be an open key for some distance. These little mountain towns mostly went to bed early.

However, the freight train up ahead kept moving. The engineer of the labor train moved up close to the caboose of the string immediately ahead and tooted for right of way like mad. As though that would do any good! The end-man of the freight came out and made faces in the lamplight at the engine crew.

Billy Blunt was in a terrible state of mind over the delay.

"Jerry Madden will have my hide and nail it on his barn door, for fair," he groaned.

"How can you be blamed?" Ralph asked.

"That makes no-never-mind to Jerry!" declared the labor boss. "I tell you 'impossible' is another word he don't believe is in the dictionary. I was to get this gang to the Chasm ready to go to work at one in the morning. To spell the gang already there, you know. And here we are!"

"But we are getting there. It isn't one o'clock yet," Ralph said.

"At this rate we won't arrive till after the new bridge is up and painted two coats," growled Blunt.

"If we could wire headquarters for permission to cross over on the east-bound and so get ahead of this freight congestion?" murmured Ralph.

"Wire from *where?*" scoffed Blunt. "And no knowing what trains they've got scheduled for that track. Hi! What's this coming right now?"

With a shriek and roar a long freight, east-bound, dashed past the slowly moving work train. Both Ralph and Billy Blunt rushed out upon the caboose platform to watch it fly by and follow its tail lights with wondering gaze.

"My goodness! What's that?" gasped the young train dispatcher. "I did not know there was such a train stalled this side of the Chasm. Where could it have come from? Why wasn't it sent east before?"

"If you ask me," declared the puzzled foreman, "I should say it was the regular east-bound fast freight, 'bout an hour behind time."

"Number Eighty-three?" cried Ralph. "Impossible! Unless she jumped the Chasm. Has Jerry Madden found some way of making 'em fly?"

"Mebbe," Blunt returned, grinning.

He went back and sat down again, showing

signs of evident relief, and Ralph could not understand why. Blunt filled his pipe and sat down to smoke.

"Nothin' Jerry Madden does will ever s'prise me, sir," the boss declaimed in a reminiscent mood.

"I remember when they was buildin' the masonry piers for the Long Bridge at Daytonia. They struck a regular bottomless pit at one point. Twice they got a pier nicely built, and it went out over-night. Squashed right down, it did, and melted into the swamp.

" 'It's a quagmire, or quicksand, of unknown depth,' said the engineers, and they began to figure out how much good earth, and gravel, and cement, they would have to pour into the pot before the masonry could have a solid foundation.

"Meanwhile Jerry went on with his job. He builded him a coffer-dam around the spot, so he did, sinkin' it as he pumped out the sand and water, and finally reached hardpan ten foot below the level of the other pier foundations.

"But he had this pier built and the coffer-dam removed before the engineers got their figures to suit 'em. And nobody ain't ever complained about the security of the Long Bridge yet."

Ralph fell asleep; but he awoke when the train came to a sudden and jarring stop.

"What under the sun's the matter *now?*" he demanded.

"We've arove," said Blunt, knocking out the ashes of his pipe. "At least, we're as near the Chasm as we're likely to get for the rattlers ahead of us. Come on, youngster, if you want to see what Jerry's been doin'."

Ralph clattered out after Blunt and down the steps. The right of way up ahead was ablaze with torches. The freight trains were going somewhere, that was sure; but where?

Following Billy Blunt, the young train dispatcher found a lean, gray-faced man, with a cropped mustache and fluent tongue, giving orders to sub-bosses with few gestures but much emphasis. He shot one question only at Blunt:

"So you've got your gang here at last, have you, Billy?"

"Yes, Jerry. Thought we wouldn't ever——"

"Get 'em here and ready to jump in. The whistle will blow in a minute," jerked out the big boss. "Hope they've eaten their lunches, for I'm not going to knock 'em off till seven—six hours' shift for 'em. Any of 'em don't like it, let 'em stop before they begin."

"All right," rejoined Blunt and hurried away.

Not until then did Madden give an eye to Ralph Fairbanks. He said softly:

"You're chief dispatcher at the Junction?"

"Yes," admitted Ralph. "I guess you've heard from Mr. Glidden about my coming over?"

"I heard of you long before, too, Kid," said the old bridge builder. "Glad to meet up with you," and he shook hands. "You look as though you'd been through something."

"I have. But mainly I'm anxious to know what's doing with all this freight that was stalled."

"Oh, the right of way was opened two hours ago," said Madden carelessly. "I wired Glidden, and he jumped in and made up a schedule that's working pretty good, you not being on the spot, Mr. Fairbanks."

"Great heavens, man!" gasped Ralph. "You can't have got the blueprints from the engineers' office yet?"

"I dunno whether the engineer's got his picture drawed yet," said Madden grimly, "but there's a span up and the west-bound trains are running over. They shift and send an east-bound through now and then. We'll have the riveters at work on a steel span for the east-bound track before dawn, and after that's done right we'll rebuild this temporary structure for the west-bound. You know, Mr. Fairbanks, bridges were built long before railroads had civil engineers."

Ralph stared at him. "I'd heard you were a miracle worker, Mr. Madden," he said at last. "And I hand it to you. You *are!*"

He hurried away then to where he saw the lights bright in the tower near the head of the bridge. As Madden had said, the stalled freight trains were passing over the temporary span of the bridge, one after another. Glidden had evidently given the freight traffic right of way so as to clear the division as much as possible before the regular schedule of passenger trains was put into execution at six A. M.

"This division should be a four-track road," Ralph thought. "If the Government is going to crowd us so with special freight, something will have to be done to relieve the pressure, that is sure."

He climbed up into the tower and showed his telegrapher's card to one of the men on duty, but without explaining who he was.

"Here's another boomer, Joe," said this man over his shoulder to another operator working at a key. "Know him?"

"Where do you hail from, Kid?" queried Joe. "And what do you want?"

"Just want to put through a message to division headquarters," Ralph explained. "Let me pound out the Morse myself, will you?"

"What's your headquarters' stuff?" asked Joe suspiciously. "His Nibs isn't there. Only the night chief."

Ralph smiled quietly. The operator was referring to Ralph himself when he spoke of "His Nibs."

"I've got a message for Mr. Glidden, the division manager. Special," he said dryly, and slid into the chair the operator gave up to him.

The moment Ralph began to call, Joe looked at him more sharply:

"J. G. wanted. Tell him FBX calling."

"FBX" was Ralph's private code signature. The instant Glidden answered Ralph rattled off his report, all in code. The eyes of the operators in the tower were sticking out then. They could not understand the meaning of a word Ralph was sending, for the code was private, but Joe jumped to the right conclusion about the stranger, if the others did not.

"I've taken too much of your stuff, Mr. Fairbanks, not to recognize it now," he said, coming forward when Ralph had finished. "Anything more we can do for you?"

"Just keep still about my being over here at the Chasm," returned the chief dispatcher. "An

old brasspounder can't be fooled, can he?" And Ralph laughed.

"I know your sending, Mr. Fairbanks. I'd know it anywhere this side of the Golden Gate," said Joe, as Ralph hurried out.

The young fellow heard two men talking at the foot of the tower stairs. One was lighting his pipe as he said:

"Yes, sir!" Puff! "They got two of 'em." Puff. "That they think was into"—puff!—"the scrape. And bejabbers"—puff!—"mebbe they was."

"Who got 'em?" asked the second man.

"That railroad officer, Bob Adair. There's a mon for yez! One's a German farmer livin' back here a piece, on this side of the Chasm. He's been under suspicion, it seems.

"T'other's an Austrich, I dunno——"

"Go on with you!" chuckled the second man. "An ostrich is a bur-r-d, Mike."

"And so's this la-a-ad a bur-r-rd," growled the first speaker. "But he's not got feathers on him, bejabbers. He comes from a place called Austria. They have a keezer there, too—he plays sicond fiddle to this here Keezer Bill that's makin' all the rumpus.

"Well!" continued the smoker, smacking his lips. "This here bur-r-rd av an Austrich, he

wor-r-rked here on a siction gang, same as you or me would. Thin he jumped his job and went to Proberst to wor-r-rk in the munitions factory. They think he stole the explosives over there that lifted this same bridge-span into the air yisterday, and that the German farmer teamed it over here for him."

"The dirty spies!" ejaculated the other man as the two moved away. "They ought to hang 'em!"

"Well, no. That ain't our American way of it," declared his friend earnestly. "We're a mighty patient people, for a fac'!"

"Huh!" said the other in some disgust. "Do even the Irish get patient when they come over here?"

"Ain't it so, now?" responded the first speaker coolly. "This bein' an Amur-rican is a great thing, Denny. It puts responsibility on to yez."

"Where have they got the prisoners?" Ralph heard the second man ask as they walked on.

"Over yon, locked into an empty box car. They'll be taken to the county seat and jailed, later."

Ralph wanted to see Mr. Bob Adair very much just then, and he believed he must be near. As he crossed over the betracked plateau at the bridge head, he saw that everybody was busy.

Gangs of workmen were engaged repairing the damage done by the explosion all about the scene of the wreck.

Flaming torches showed dimly long strings of freight cars moving slowly across the temporary span of the bridge, on the west track. There were several flat cars of rails and girders on the scene, ready for the riveting gangs when they should appear.

"This Jerry Madden is really a miracle man," muttered Ralph, passing on.

On a siding stood a box car, and he saw a man with a torch working under it. Ralph passed so close to this man that he could see his face, and recognized it as being that of the fellow, interest in whom had caused him to work so hard to join Billy Blunt's gang.

Scalen, or Randal, or whatever the fellow's real name was, had probably been given the job of repairing the car so that Blunt could keep an eye on him, for the labor boss was near and waved his hand to Ralph as the latter passed by.

Down the hill a little way, just below a crossing, was a brightly lighted office. Ralph had a feeling that this was headquarters for the railroad police, and he approached the office. Before the door an automobile was standing, and the chauffeur sat at his wheel with the engine running.

A powerfully built man wearing a slouch hat came from the office, and Mr. Bob Adair was right behind him. As Ralph drew near he heard the railroad detective say:

"I'm ready to hand them over to you, Sheriff Greber. But you must take full responsibility for their safety if I do so. On the other hand I can wait for the Federal Marshal to appear and——"

"This here is a county matter," the big man interrupted warmly. "We can handle it. Don't want no fussy Federal agents butting into our business."

"It isn't what we want in these times, that goes," Adair said pointedly. "I tell you I have telegraphed full particulars of the arrest to the Department of Justice. The mere fact that I have not yet received a reply does not change our responsibility in the least."

"I know my duty. I do it," growled the big man, Greber. "I'm a county officer, and I'm responsible to the county only."

"You'll find out something new about that, perhaps," Adair said dryly. "In any case, you must give me written receipt for the two suspects. They are my prisoners."

"You haf no right to dake prisoners!" cried the sheriff excitedly, and his German accent be-

came more pronounced. "And you cannot hold them."

"They are now on railroad property, no matter where I got them," Adair told him. "And you can't take them unless I wish to give them up. Not without due process of law."

"I'll show you!" threatened the big man, getting into the automobile. "Any magistrate will issue a warrant for me."

"He won't unless his name smells of sauerkraut," returned the railroad detective, as the high-powered car started and the doughty sheriff was whirled away.

Then to himself Ralph heard Adair mutter:

"I believe I'm going to have trouble with that German. Is it because he is just thick, or is he, too, a traitor?"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TANGLE

RALPH stepped closer to the detective and put a hand upon his arm.

"Mr. Adair!"

"Hullo! Who have we here? Not Fairbanks?" and Adair's hand closed warmly upon Ralph's. "What's the meaning of this masquerade? You are taking a leaf from Zeph's book, aren't you?"

"Perhaps," the young train dispatcher told him. "I wanted to move around among Billy Blunt's gang without attracting too much attention."

"You came up with Blunt?"

Ralph briefly explained. He went further and spoke of the man, Peter Randal, and his suspicions of the German. Mr. Adair listened with the closest of attention, nodding briefly now and then.

"I shouldn't wonder if he was one of them," he told Ralph. "They are strung along the whole road, and where the German residents are thickest

they are the most active. Now, right here at McMillan, for instance——"

"I overheard what the sheriff said," Ralph interposed. "Is he to be trusted?"

"I really can't make him out. He may merely be one of these pompous old ducks who are always afraid people won't give them all the right of way they desire. He's a politician, I guess, and might be hampered in a case like this by thinking of the German vote."

"How about that Jake Mund? Was he in this business of the wrecked bridge?" Ralph asked curiously.

"I wired Zeph. Did you know Dallas was sticking close to Mund?"

"Yes, sir. I saw him the other day. They are on Section Ten, just this side of Coolidge."

Adair nodded. "Yes. Zeph is sticking to Mund like a mussel to a rock. I wired Zeph almost at once and he returned word that Mund hadn't been out of his sight. I really believe this blow-up was arranged locally. Lots of Germans around the Chasm, as I said."

"They seem to be everywhere," groaned Ralph. "And which are to be trusted? There's Otto."

"Ah, yes. The boy of whom you—and our friend, Zeph Dallas—told me. He is still with you in the dispatchers' office?"

"Very much so. Especially when I left last evening," Ralph chuckled. "These are his clothes I've got on," and he proceeded to relate further particulars of his adventure.

This brought up Otto's strange interest on the morning previous in the railroad map.

"I could easily find out what he was looking at so closely," Ralph assured the detective. "He had his finger right on McMillan. And that was hours before the bridge was blown up."

"To be exact, about five hours?" ruminated Mr. Adair.

"Yes, just about."

"It may go to prove what I have believed, and declared: The plot is far-reaching—the main conspiracy, I mean. Men favoring the German cause are working against the smooth running of the railroad's affairs all along the system on every branch. And this Mountain Division seems to be fairly rotten with the traitors."

"I fear so," agreed Ralph.

They spoke further regarding the puzzling and suspicious matters that had come under the notice of the young train dispatcher since the attempt had been made to blow up the first troop train. Of course, Mr. Adair did not take him into his confidence in many particulars; he intimated, however, that much might be divulged in

the newspapers after the examination of the two men he had captured and had shut into the box car on the siding.

"If these are the fellows who did it, I believe they will squeal," the detective said. "They are both weaklings. Stronger minds have influenced them."

"Something of Otto's caliber?" suggested Ralph.

"I fancy so. And that boy may be perfectly innocent at that. We don't really know. But if I can make these two fellows talk we may begin to get at facts."

"If you hand them over to that Sheriff Greber do you think they will ever come to trial?"

"I don't know. The sheriff puzzles me," Adair admitted. "As I said before I do not know how to take him. And there is that in the offing that worries me greatly."

"Something new?" Ralph ventured.

"I don't know that you have heard of it yet, Fairbanks. The Government has decided to send many men from the northern cantonments to those in the South, and many of the trains will come over your division. It is supposed to be a secret yet."

"I am sure I had not heard of it before."

"No. President Grant of the G. N. has been

informed; and he told me. Few of the officials have been told yet. But you are in a position to help get the trains through, Fairbanks, and I trust you will do your part."

"I'll do everything in my power," declared Ralph earnestly. "Be sure I shall not again overlook such a warning as was flung into my window before that other train went through."

They left the office together and walked up toward the busy scene at the roadbed level. Trains were crossing over the temporary span from the west with more frequency, and being switched on to the proper track. Ralph intended to jump on one of these eastbound trains and so get back to Stanley Junction.

"I'll look up this fellow on Blunt's gang—Scalen, does he call himself now?" Adair said. "Hold on a minute, Fairbanks. Let's take a look at my prisoners." He halted at the end of a freight car standing on a siding. It stood alone and much in the dark.

As Mr. Adair approached the side door of the car he took a key from his pocket. There was a brass padlock fastening the door. The railroad detective glanced over his shoulder and called to a laborer who was passing along.

"Hey, Jimmy! Come roll back this prison door for me, will you?"

The fellow came. Adair reached up and turned the key in the padlock, removing the latter from the staple.

"Now," he said, and drew back, plucking a flashlight from his pocket and holding it in readiness to use.

The laborer pushed back the sliding door of the car. It was pitch dark inside. Adair flashed the spot of his handlamp into the darkness. It flickered about the car, first one end and then the other, and showed——

Nothing! Nobody was in the car. Adair uttered a loud shout, placed a hand on Ralph's shoulder and the other on the car floor, and leaped through the high doorway.

He scrambled up from his hands and knees at once. Again he shot the ray of light about the car.

"Vamoosed!" he gasped in wonder and disgust.

CHAPTER XXII

"THEY'LL NEVER GET THROUGH"

RALPH FAIRBANKS did not follow the railroad detective into the car. He dived under it instead. At one end he could see Adair's flickering light through the flooring. Stooping almost double, he ran quickly to that point.

A section of the floor large enough for a man to pass through had been sawed through the planking.

Ralph popped his head through this aperture.

"What under the sun!" ejaculated the detective. "Fairbanks?"

"No need to look further, Mr. Adair," Ralph said. "Here's how they escaped. And I know who turned the trick."

"You mean to say you know who released them?" repeated Adair. "Not Sheriff Greber, I guess?"

"He had nothing to do with it, I presume. Not personally, at least," Ralph told him. "But I saw a fellow working under this car as I came along from the blocktower. I thought he was re-

pairing something under here. As Blunt was near at the time, I supposed it was all right."

"Who do you say was under the car?"

"That Peter Randal. He's the fellow. I bet he came up here on the work train for just that purpose."

"He couldn't have known those two suspects were captured when the work train left the Junction," grumbled Adair. "No, he jumped in and did his little bit as soon as he arrived. It's just as I say. The place is full of German sympathizers. There must be somebody who directs their activities—and he's on the ground.

"Isn't it the limit?" added the road detective, in disgusted comment, as he prepared to leap out of the car again.

Ralph came out from beneath the car and joined him. The laborer had gone about his business. The detective seemed nonplussed.

"They will blame me," he said. "I should have placed an armed guard here. But there's so much for every man in the railroad service to do, and I thought this car, with so many people working near, would effectually imprison those two chaps. Now——"

They heard a motor car coming up the road, which here crossed the railroad tracks. Adair turned that way and Ralph looked, too. The ma-

chine stopped and the huge, loutish figure of Sheriff Greber got out.

"Hey, you!" he shouted to the railroad detective. "I told you I'd find out who was who 'round here. I've a paper calling for the delivery of those men into the care of the county."

"You can't have them," Adair said, strolling over to the car to meet the county officer.

"You'd better not talk that way, Mister," said the sheriff sharply. "I know my rights."

"Well, if your rights include discovering two men who are not here, go ahead and take them."

"Vat you mean, huh?" grunted the sheriff.

"Take a look," said the detective, with a wave of his hand toward the box car. "I had 'em shut up there all right as I told you. But some cunning little friend of theirs sawed a way to freedom for them. We were just finding out our loss as you drove up."

"They haf escaped yet?" demanded the sheriff in blank amazement.

"You've said it."

"De prisoners haf escaped, Louie!" cried the sheriff to another man who sat in the tonneau of his car. "Vat you t'ink?"

The man spoken to said something in German. Adair spoke quickly, for both he and Ralph understood the slurring remark.

"There seem to be too many men around here of the same breed as those two I nabbed. That's what is the matter! The next man I pick up who I think is mixed up in these plots against the Government, I'll put under armed guards, and the guards will have orders to shoot."

"You take a mighty high way mit you," growled Greber, shaking his big head like an angry bull.

"I know my rights on railroad property," said Adair more cheerfully. "Now I will see about gathering in those two fellows again."

"You'll never get 'em!" snarled Louie, in the automobile.

"Don't be too sure. I sha'n't expect the sheriff's office of this county to help me. But we'll hear from the Department of Justice."

"It iss not their business!" cried Sheriff Greber angrily. "It is the business of the county to punish those who blowed up that bridge. I know what I am doing."

"And I see you county officers doing it—not!" scornfully returned the railroad detective. "Look here, Greber! You are getting in wrong. You think your county organization is bigger than the state, bigger than the Federal Government, in fact. You'll learn."

"I knows mein duty, undt I do it," growled

the sheriff, with dogged persistency. "You can't tell me noddings."

"That's right. Nobody can tell a man of your breed anything," rejoined the railroad detective with disgust. "Pig-headedness is the chief characteristic you possess. But let me observe right here: There is a time coming, and coming swiftly, Greber, when you will sing a different tune."

"I don't sing no tune," declared the man, shaking his head again. "I do mein duty."

"Just so. And your duty demands that you look out for such fellows as those two I picked up last night and see that they do nothing against the law."

"I cannot arrest a man till a law has been broken."

"Oh, yes, you can. You know there are men meeting in lonely barns, and in farmhouses, in your county, who are plotting against the commonwealth. And you do nothing to break up these meetings. I've got *your* number."

"Men haf a right to meet undt to talk," said the sheriff. "Opinions can be expressed."

"Not in war times. You'll find that out. You let these fellows blow and gas, and do a few more such tricks as the wrecking of this bridge span, and all of a sudden you'll find the decent

citizens aroused. There will be hangings, and worse. I warn you. And if there is rioting in your county, Greber, your office will be at fault for not nipping these things in the bud."

"I do my duty," reiterated the man with persistence.

"Cat's foot!" snapped the detective. "Don't keep harping on that 'duty' business. It won't save you from disgrace—and worse—when the time comes for a show-down. Every honest and patriotic state officer should do more than his duty at this time."

"You don't haf to tell me," repeated Greber. "I know vat I know."

"Perhaps," snapped Adair. "But I'll tell you something you don't know. Before long there will be troop trains—many of them—coming over this road. Are you going to do your best to see that those trains go through safely?"

"They ain't so foolish—the military—as to try it," declared Greber with confidence. "The people of this county don't want no movements of troops here. I haf so warned the Governor. They move 'em through here at their peril."

Adair raised both clenched hands heavenward and shook them in despair.

"Oh, you dunce!" he cried. "You haven't woke up. Your people here haven't woke up.

Those troop trains have got to go through."

"They'll never get through, I tell you!" declared the dogged Sheriff Greber, still shaking his head. "It can't be done. De peoples von't let dem."

"Good-*night!*" exclaimed Adair, and led the listening Ralph away by the elbow. "Come on, Fairbanks," he said. "If I talk with that thick-head any more I'll lose my mind."

But Ralph was much disturbed by what the sheriff of the county had said. Was there a determined conspiracy against the road and the Government? Could it be possible that these pro-Germans were bold enough and numerous enough to attempt to stop the trains in question?

He must shoulder some considerable responsibility when the time came for the army trains to pass over this division. He said nothing in comment to Mr. Adair, but secretly the young train dispatcher determined that he should not be found wanting when the hour arrived.

CHAPTER XXIII

NEW SUSPICIONS

Ralph caught a freight train going east which brought him into the Stanley Junction yard shortly after seven o'clock. By that time everything was moving normally all along the division.

He slipped into Tower ZZ first of all and used the telephone to assure his mother, whom he knew would be anxious, that he was all right. He would be unable to get home again before supper time, he very well knew.

Then he walked up the long yard, attracting as little attention as possible, and got into his private office without even being challenged by the sleepy third trick men who were still on the job.

He found his own suit of clothes, nicely pressed and folded, lying over the back of his chair. He changed quickly into these garments and then shouted for Otto. The German lad, who had been sweeping out Mr. Glidden's private office, came running. His eyes were round and he was pale and scared looking. Evidently he expected

to be hauled over the coals by the young chief dispatcher.

"Much obliged for the good care you took of my suit," Ralph said, smiling grimly. "You didn't run away, either."

"*Nein!*" exploded Otto. "I don't run avay. Eferybody running avay; but not me."

"Humph! Peter Randal was running away, was he? Want to know what happened to him?"

Otto said nothing, but curiosity looked out of his blinking eyes.

"I'll tell you. He's been arrested up there at McMillan for helping the two men who blew up the bridge to escape from custody. Mr. Adair's got him; and he'll get those other men who escaped. You want to have a care, Otto, as to whom you associate with."

"Peter a friend iss of mein Onkel Yawcob," the boy said, his voice shaking. "I haf notting to do mit him, else."

"Have nothing to do with such people anyway if you want to keep out of trouble. By the way, do you know where your Uncle Jake is now?"

Otto wagged his head dumbly. He was evidently much perturbed. The arrival of Mr. Glidden closed the conversation, and the sweeping boy withdrew. The manager was excited.

"Fairbanks, I never was so flabbergasted in my life as I was when the towerman at the Chasm wired in that the west-bound track was clear and that we could begin sending the trains over. I had been waiting here to get your message——"

"I had nothing to do with the repairs on the bridge," laughed Ralph.

"No. That Jerry Madden is a miracle worker, just as you said," Glidden agreed. "But how did he do it?"

"You'll have to ask him. I guess he couldn't explain very well. But he has been jumping in and doing things like that for years and years. And that track is solidly built, at that. But the riveters are at work on the steel structure now," the young fellow added.

"Anyhow," Gildden said, "it's saved our lives. How is the outlook this morning? Is there anything new?"

"I haven't examined the third trick reports yet," Ralph told him. "I'll get to work on the schedule in a minute. But I want to tell you several things that I hadn't time to wire last night."

He went on to relate to the interested manager of the division the high points of his adventures of the night. Mr. Adair had already started an investigation of the cause of the six freight cars

chasing the work train down the mountainside beyond Coolidge.

"And believe me," Ralph added, with emphasis, "if it hadn't been for Patsy Gallagher's gasoline speeder those wild cars would have done some damage."

"I guess it took your head, as well as the speerer, to save Billy Blunt's crew," Glidden returned with appreciation. "You're a plucky one, Fairbanks, and always were."

"Pluck is going to be needed on this division, Mr. Glidden," Ralph said earnestly, "and I hope I shall have my share."

"What do you mean?" the man asked curiously.

"I was told something last night, or this morning, rather, that you should know, too. But it must not be discussed in general until we hear the news officially from President Grant."

"What is it?" repeated Glidden.

"A great movement of troops from northern cantonments to southern camps is contemplated. Logically the Mountain Division of this railroad of ours will have to handle the army trains."

"Of course," admitted Mr. Glidden, but with worried aspect. "Are you sure of this, Fairbanks?"

"Mr. Bob Adair told me. He got it straight from President Grant."

"My goodness, I hope it is not so!" the division manager sighed.

"Why do you say that?" Ralph demanded.

"I don't want the responsibility. Do you realize what it means?"

"We've got to get 'em through safely—that is what it means," said Ralph vigorously. "And, believe me, we'll do it, Glidden."

"You are young; you are hopeful," the manager said. "But at my age I am not seeking added responsibility. I wish the super was on deck again."

"So do I. Nevertheless, I should feel the responsibility of this army train movement just as deeply if he were with us. It is surely up to us to keep things moving. President Grant will expect it"

Glidden was much worried by the announcement Ralph had made. He did not talk about the expected movement of troops again. But during the following days that subject was seldom out of Ralph Fairbanks' thoughts.

The half-wrecked No. 1001 came back from the shops and was given over to the charge of Jenks and his fireman, Carraway. How the new engine had come to start from Coolidge and run

wild on the fatal first day of the locomotive's appearance on the division, had never been satisfactorily decided. But no fault had been attached to her crew's conduct on that occasion.

"She's a beautiful steamer, Mr. Fairbanks," Jenks confided to Ralph. "But I shall never trust the old mill alone again—believe me! Either Carraway is on her deck, or I am, from one end of the run to the other. We take no chances with her a second time."

"Get to know her," Ralph advised. "She's a beautiful piece of goods," and the young fellow glanced over the engine's shining parts admiringly. "A little later you will have some responsibility, you and this One Thousand One."

"Troop trains?" Jenks asked.

Ralph nodded. "That's what they say, Jenks. And you and your striker will have your share of them to pull, I fancy."

There were several other locomotives in the class of No. 1001 expected from the shops and Ralph knew that the best of them would be put into Government service. Their crews would be selected with much care, too. Jenks and Carraway were safe and patriotic men.

But that there were some unpatriotic individuals working against the best interests of the G. N. was made apparent as the days went by.

That a widespread conspiracy of traitors and pro-Germans existed could not be doubted.

On more than one occasion, and from several people whom he had no reason to consider unpatriotic, Ralph heard doubts expressed as to whether the military plans of the Government would go smoothly. The opinion of these people seemed to be that there would be a great uprising of conscientious objectors and others, and that thereby the United States Government would not be able to fulfill her promises to the Allies.

Little incidents in the yard continued to occur —accidents that care or attention would have eliminated. In addition there were occurrences that positively were the work of the enemy— Ralph Fairbanks could have no doubt of that.

One night during the "graveyard" shift a through freight was thrown on to a siding, and, before her engineer could pull down he smashed into a string of dead gondolas and derailed more than a dozen cars. It was never discovered who turned the switch.

Fortunately no lives were lost; but the fireman went to the hospital and one of the brakemen was laid up for a fortnight with a broken finger. Every trainman taken off the railroad force was missed these days, too.

It was sometimes next to impossible to send

out full crews with some of the trains. They had to cut passenger service down to a minimum to find crews to handle freight trains.

Then one day a tie was found spiked across the eastbound track not far out of town. It was no boyish trick, but a deliberate endeavor to wreck a train. At another time a track walker found the plate holding two rail ends removed. The first train to hit the break would doubtless have been ditched.

Following the blowing up of the bridge at McMillan Chasm there had been a sharp criticism by the Department of Justice of the civil authorities of the county in which the crime had been committed.

Mr. Bob Adair had arrested and the courts had held for trial Peter Randal, who had made possible the escape of the two men accused of wrecking the bridge, but the sheriff of the county and his deputies had been unable to recover the missing prisoners.

There was friction all the time between the railroad police and the county officers. A preponderance of German names were on the roster of political appointees in the county. Just how many of these officials were against the Government it was hard to tell.

Ralph Fairbanks believed with Mr. Adair that

there would soon be a "show down" on this question. The true feelings of the public at large must be made known. Seditious talk and traitorous activities would yet bring the matter to a head.

The German propagandists of all kinds were bold and loquacious; but Ralph doubted if there were really so many of them as there seemed to be by the noise they made.

As a usual thing the quiet and law-abiding people of a community are slow to be aroused. There was bound to be some happening that would spur the public to an expression of opinion that could not be misunderstood by the party of the ill-affected.

Ralph did not see Zeph Dallas during this time; but he learned that Mr. Adair had put at least one trusted man into every section gang on the division to watch suspected individuals and report upon all that they saw or heard.

Such men as Jake Mund, who were under suspicion, were being reckoned up by the railroad police. Ralph himself tried to keep in touch with all that went on in the Junction yard; and a stranger about the railroad property was an object of his immediate suspicion.

Ralph usually made his inquiries through Pelly, who seemed a more than ordinarily observant

man. On one occasion when the lanky, drawling roundhouse man was in Ralph's office, the latter suddenly made a most startling discovery.

How it came about the young dispatcher could not have told; but while Pelly was drawling along it suddenly smote Ralph Fairbanks that the man's tone and manner of speech fitted closely that of the fellow whom he had overheard talking with the unknown German the night Peter Randal had derailed engine No. 802 at the roundhouse turntable.

The thought was vastly disturbing to Ralph. If Pelly was the fellow who had promised the mysterious German agent more action for his money, he was a wretched traitor. A man of native extraction who sold himself into the employ of the enemy was a worse traitor than those of German descent who acted as spies.

Pelly, the loud-mouthed American! He was a regular jingo. Ralph could not believe this of the man; and yet the suspicion stuck in his mind like a barb.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT THE PULLMAN WINDOW

Pelly and Otto. These two individuals puzzled Ralph mightily.

Otto he saw mooning about the dispatchers' offices at all hours of the day. Had the lad seemed more alert and intelligent he might, indeed, have been suspected as being engaged as a spy by the conspirators who were undoubtedly seeking to thwart the Government's plans.

There was a deal that might be learned about the train dispatchers' office of possible usefulness to the enemy. If Otto had possessed a better command of English and had he understood telegraphing, Ralph would have felt sure that he really was a spy.

As for Pelly, he truly could not make up his mind. It seemed scarcely possible that two men's voices could so closely resemble each other as Pelly's and that of the fellow whom Ralph had overheard in conference with the German agent.

Had Mr. Bob Adair come to see him at this time Ralph would have confessed his anxiety to

him; but all he heard directly from the chief of the railroad police was on a certain occasion when a stranger, giving his name as Blair, called on the young chief dispatcher.

This Mr. Blair, a very quiet-appearing, gray-bearded man wearing spectacles, was ushered into Ralph's room one afternoon by an operator.

"Gentleman says he has a letter for you, Mr. Fairbanks," said the telegrapher in explanation.

Mr. Blair offered Ralph a sealed letter on approaching the desk. Across the face of the envelope the dispatcher saw a line: "Introducing Mr. Horace Blair" in a handwriting that he could not mistake.

"You come from Mr. Adair," Ralph said. "Sit down, sir!"

He slit the envelope and drew out the note it contained. It was brief and very much to the point:

"You can open her wide to this man.—B. A."

"That seems to give you a clear waybill, Mr. Blair," Ralph said with a little smile. "What can I do for you?"

The gentleman leaned nearer, opened his coat, turned back his vest at the armpit, and displayed the tiny gold shield of the Secret Service.

"Anything that I can do for you?" repeated Ralph, nodding.

"We are after a chap known as Number Forty. Mr. Adair told me that, from something you had told him, he believed you had probably seen the man."

"I don't know anybody by that nickname," Ralph returned doubtfully.

"These German agents are mostly known by numbers. Those that are intrusted with the payment of bills, especially. This man is supposed to be high in the confidence of the chiefs of the German espionage system."

Ralph's thought flashed instantly to the man whom he had heard talking the night engine No. 802 had been derailed, the German with whom Pelly was now so unfortunately connected in his mind. He spoke of this person doubtfully. He was not willing to point the Secret Service man's suspicion toward the roundhouse employee.

"I know this man I told Mr. Adair of is a German. And I thought at the time he might be a person called Pringer, who had a paper-hanging business on High Street just previous to the attempt to blow up the School Street bridge here at the Junction."

"I have heard about that," said Mr. Baird. "Your chief of police has furnished us with a

full report of that,—and I know Pringer."

Ralph wanted to ask Mr. Baird if Chief Rhinemeyer was considered a perfectly patriotic official; but he shrank from doing so. Instead he carefully related the details of his adventures on the day and night when the troop train had gone through and this tangle of mystery and duplicity had begun.

Pringer's individuality had made a deep impression on the mind of the chief dispatcher of the division. His arrogant and cruel treatment of the boy, Otto, and afterward his appearance so near the School Street bridge just before the troop train was due, had made him a marked man in Ralph's thought.

"The boy, you say, is working here?" asked Mr. Baird, caressing the point of his beard thoughtfully.

"Yes. By Mr. Adair's advice I have kept track of him. To tell the truth he seems innocent enough——"

"Perhaps too innocent?" suggested the operative.

"He's only a boy," Ralph returned hesitatingly. "I do not think he is deep enough to be really a spy for them."

"Let me judge for myself, Mr. Fairbanks," said the man.

"Certainly."

Ralph drew his desk telephone nearer and took the receiver from the hook. He called the outer office, and after a few minutes managed to find Otto. He instructed him to appear at once in the small office.

In a few minutes Otto clumped in. He always had the appearance of being half scared to death. Perhaps if it had not been for this appearance Ralph would not have so doubted his honesty.

"So this is the young man?" Mr. Blair said, viewing Otto with sharp scrutiny.

He spoke to the boy in German. Ralph could follow the questioning after a fashion; but he was not proficient enough in the language to catch everything that was said.

After a time Otto began to have some confidence in the gray-bearded stranger. What he could tell of the man, Pringer, seemed unimportant. He had obtained work with him just by chance. It had lasted less than a week. Then he had had a fight over a spilled bucket of paste and had left him.

"You know that Pringer sold out soon after?" Blair asked.

"*Ja.* Freddy Holtz told me that," admitted the boy.

"Do you have any reason to doubt that 'Pringer' was the man's real name?"

"Oh, it must be his name. It on his sign vass," Otto said hurriedly, in English. "Undt it vass on his cards. Sure it vass his name."

"While you were working for him, Otto, did you ever see a man, whose hair was very white, but whose mustache was black, jet black, as though it had been dyed, come to see him? This man was about forty years old and was dressed like a gentleman, very nicely indeed."

Otto's eyes bulged. He seemed to be thinking. He finally wagged his head solemnly.

"I nefer see notting," he declared. "I just vork for Herr Pringer. Dot's all."

"And that will be all for you now, Otto," said Blair, pleasantly, and gave the boy a dollar. "Thank you very much."

Otto's face was a study. The dollar evidently pleased him, but he was much puzzled as well. It was plain that he did not know whether to consider Mr. Blair a friend or not.

"I am afraid," said Ralph, after the boy had gone, "that you did not learn much of consequence from Otto.

"And for that very reason," said Blair dryly, "I should advise you to continue to watch him, Mr. Fairbanks."

"I really would like to ask a question, Mr. Blair," Ralph said hesitatingly.

The Secret Service man's eyes twinkled. "Do you mean a question about the man with the perfectly white hair and the black mustache?"

"Yes. Who is he?"

"He may be an imaginary person," and Baird laughed. "But—well, I thought I might startle Otto into letting slip something about having seen other people with Pringer. Either the boy is a perfect numskull, or he is smart beyond imagination."

Ralph's mind was continually upon these mysteries. It was a week later that an incident, and one the youth was not likely to forget soon, occurred, which coupled him up again to the conspiracy, some details of which he had been privileged to learn.

Although little snow had fallen, winter was really at hand. The thermometer on this particular day was dropping toward zero with startling rapidity.

After supper Ralph dressed warmly and started back to the yard. He wanted to be sure the second trick men handled the traffic as he had directed. The division was again crammed with freight.

A through passenger train, known as the

Western Flier, had been diverted from the main stem to run over the Mountain Division. It made its stop at Stanley Junction at 9:43, with an eight-minute interval before it took up its run for the next stop, at Valley Stream. The best locomotive in the house had to be groomed for this run. If the track became slippery, or if there was a storm, they had to double-head her over the Mountain Division.

This change in the routing of the Western Flier had been made for the express purpose of shortening the continental schedule from coast to coast. The Great Northern had to do its share in decreasing the running time of this first-class train.

About the time the Western Flier steamed into the Junction, Ralph went down the yard to see the night yardmaster about the getting out some dead freight that Glidden was worried about.

The yard office was an old shack pretty near to the end of the yard. Jack had not yet appeared, but he was expected. Ralph found the tobacco smoke and the heat of the freely burning stove too much for him, and he stepped outside the office just as the big engine that had been coupled to the fast train sent up its first puff of white smoke.

She started easily with her heavy load of ves-

tibuled coaches. The first two were mail cars and the third a through express car. Then came the baggage car, smoking car, and six sleeping cars. There was not a day coach in the string.

Ralph stepped over near the main track to watch the varnished train go by. The engineer did not give her much steam through the yard, and the train was rolling easily when it began to pass Ralph Fairbanks' position.

He stared idly in through the windows of the first Pullman coach as it came along. The berths had not been made up in this car, and at the first window the young train dispatcher saw a face he knew.

It was that of a broad-faced man, solid in appearance, and with uptilted, Kaiser-like mustache. His appearance shocked Ralph for the moment. He could not mistake this countenance. It was that of Pringer, the paperhanger who had been Otto's boss, the man Mr. Blair had spoken of as "Number Forty," a man who was a German agent high in power.

CHAPTER XXV

DEADLY PERIL

STARTLED though he was by the sight of the German agent in the Pullman car, Ralph Fairbanks did not lose his self-possession. This fellow whom only he and Zeph Dallas might be trusted to identify, was passing through Stanley Junction and might never come this way again.

To let the man escape, to go about his wicked business, was not to be thought of for a moment! Ralph's decision was made before the length of the Pullman car had rolled past. He had to get aboard that train and apprehend Pringer!

Easy to say or to determine. But to carry out the decision was another matter.

The train was rolling easily but not slowly. However, Ralph was used to boarding trains while they were in motion.

There was not a switcher or a shack in the yard who would hesitate to swing upon a train moving at the speed of the Western Flier. However, not one but would have shrunk from jumping this particular train.

For this was a vestibuled train, and Ralph Fairbanks realized keenly, as he leaped to the step of this first sleeping car, that he had but four inches of foothold and that the door was locked!

He had seized the handle with both hands and hung there for half a minute before he was able to secure his equilibrium.

He could not get off again. The wheels were turning faster and faster each moment. In a breath they were rattling over the switches at the bottom of the yard. As he flashed past Tower ZZ Ralph glanced up at the lighted windows and judged by the swiftness they passed that the train was already making thirty miles an hour.

As it chanced, no passenger had boarded the train at the Junction, so the conductor had no reason for passing through. The brakemen were comfortably ensconced for the eighty-mile run to Valley Stream, the next stop. The porters were busy making up the berths.

The last car clattered over the switches and they were in the open. Ralph realized that he was in a serious predicament. To hang on to this precarious place for more than an hour and a half, and on a night like this, seemed beyond human ability!

The cold was already benumbing. The passage of the train, as it gained in speed, engen-

dered a wind that cut like a knifeblade. Within a few minutes he knew his hands would stiffen so that they could no longer cling to the handle of the vestibule door.

Was there a place along here where he might jump? They were at the foot of the ridge on the crown of which Coolidge was set. That station would be open until the passing of the west-bound local train which left the Junction at 10:30.

Somebody might see him clinging to the step of the Pullman as the train shot past Coolidge. But would he be able to hang on until it reached the summit of the ridge?

The cold bit to the very marrow of his bones. His teeth did not chatter; already his jaws were fairly stiff with cold. His feet were lumps of ice. His hands iron hooks clutching the handle of the door. Soon they would slip and he would fall, helpless, beneath the drumming wheels.

All these thoughts passed through his mind in rapid succession. He felt himself doomed.

Yet his mind, its imaginative and creative faculties, were wide awake. He was keenly aware that if he would save himself from a terrible death under the wheels he must invent a method of escape within a few seconds.

He wore a heavy and long military-cut coat. There was a belt to it, and the coat was roomy.

Shot by a sudden thought, he released his right hand from the handle of the door and fumbled at his belt buckle. His left hand slipped. He was all but pitched off the narrow ledge on which he stood.

But he risked everything on this attempt. He released the tongue of the buckle. The end of the belt came free.

With fingers that had almost lost their feeling, he thrust the end of the belt through the handle of the door, tucked it into the buckle again, desperately drew it tight and fitted the tongue into the eyelet-hole. He swung then, dependent upon the strength of the belt to hold him to the flying train.

But his hands were free. He reached hopefully for the window above his head; but it was beyond his reach. His hands, too, were so crippled with the cold that he could not have broken the thick glass had he been able to reach it.

He swung out from the train and almost lost his foothold. The wind caused by the train's flight all but tore his feet from the narrow ledge on which they stood.

On and on he was carried, benumbed, terrified, well-nigh hopeless. Greater peril he had never suffered in his life before.

He slipped down again and hung by the belt.

But he managed to scramble his way back to the ledge and hooked his hands into the handle. In no other way could he keep from falling off the narrow foothold.

How could he ever retain his senses and sufficient strength to keep upright against the smooth, cold surface of the car door? If he could hang on until they reached Coolidge would he be seen by somebody at the station? Could he signal to the night operator there—or to anybody who lingered on the platform?

And who would linger on the wind-swept platform on a night like this? It seemed to Ralph Fairbanks that he had never felt such excruciating cold before. There would be no loiterers outside the Coolidge station.

Besides, if he was observed at that station, how could the Western Flier be signaled? There was not a station until Valley Stream was reached in which there was sure to be an open key at this hour of the night.

His benumbed brain could no longer follow out the train of this reasoning. He could think of no way in which he would be saved. To travel clear to Valley Stream, hung to this handle, would spell death for him, Ralph was sure.

A frozen lump of flesh would be all they would find when the eighty-mile run was over. He was

convinced of this. And with this conviction he gave up further thought of escape.

Dully his brain registered a last few tangible thoughts. His mother: Who would break the dreadful news to her? His work: He was sorry that he could not have gone on and risen higher in his chosen employment. The army trains that were coming through: Oh, that he might have been spared to do his share toward making their passage safe, as long as he could not join the army!

And then he thought of the face of the man he had seen through the Pullman window. The face of Pringer, Number Forty, the German agent. He might escape the observation of anybody else who knew him.

Had Ralph not made this fatal mistake of trying to board the Western Flier he could have wired ahead and had the man arrested. As it was, he would have spent his own life in a most futile way.

Pringer would not be apprehended.

CHAPTER XXVI

QUICK EYE—READY BRAIN

Zeph Dallas was having the time of his life working with the gang on Section Ten. He never had been afraid of physical labor, and the part he played as an Italian section hand was one quite within his capabilities as an imitator.

Besides, Mr. Bob Adair had partially admitted the boy into his confidence. Zeph felt that his part was of importance.

He was not alone watching Jake Mund and waiting to catch that suspected German in some act that would prove true the suspicions that had fastened upon him.

There were other men in the vicinity of Coolidge who, Adair had advised his young helper, might bear watching. McMillan Chasm, near which the bridge had been blown up, was not the only place where a pro-German element seemed strong.

There was a group of German farmers and village storekeepers at the western edge of Coolidge, and loafing about in his off hours Zeph had

heard much loose talk which smelled of disloyalty. Yet, a good deal of it was only talk, of course; and the noisiest talkers were likely to act very mildly after all.

Since Ralph's adventure when he had been shot at on the plateau and the six loaded cars had started down the mountainside, Zeph had been particularly watchful. Mr. Adair had warned him to redouble his efforts to apprehend any plotters that might be in that neighborhood.

As far as the matter of Jake Mund went, Dallas had thus far found nothing at all wrong with the man, save that he worked for Denny McQuade under an assumed name.

Keeping such close watch as he did on the man, Zeph was positive that on the night following the blowing up of the McMillan Chasm bridge, when Ralph Fairbanks had gone through on the gasoline speeder, Jake Mund was not out of the boarding house where they both lodged.

He was not one of the men who attacked Ralph and who had doubtless released the brakes of the freight cars and started them out on the main track and so down the mountainside.

Zeph arrived at the conclusion that those individuals were members of a gang of young ruffians of the neighborhood—some of them of draft age—who, hearing the older men threaten

injury to the railroad, dared do what their elders suggested. Mr. Bob Adair said he would round up that gang of hoodlums when the time was ripe.

Zeph had made reports upon several other Germans in the vicinity who had given every evidence of being both disloyal to their adopted country and vicious in their intentions regarding the railroad.

He was sure Mr. Adair had passed his reports on to the Secret Service. He expected some soap salesman, or nursery representative, or ordinary dry-goods drummer working in the locality, to turn out to be a Secret Service man investigating his clues, and that the suspects would be gathered in. He knew that government officials worked in ways all their own.

However, nothing had so far happened of this nature, and Zeph was beginning to get a little tired of his principal job. He felt that there were in Denny McQuade's gang two other men who were much more likely to be spies than Jake Mund.

When the latter started out one cold night from the boarding house without saying a word to anybody, Zeph was, however, right at his heels. He slipped out of the back door as Jake went out the front, and in the half-darkness of the badly

lighted streets Zeph followed on behind the man without running much risk of discovery.

Jake took a straight course for the railroad station, which was fully a mile from their boarding house. Zeph wished he had dressed more warmly, for the air was biting. And he began to think that he was chasing the German for nothing, anyway; the man's actions were quite open and aboveboard.

Keeping out of Jake's sight, the boy watched him enter the railroad station and approach the window of the ticket and telegraph office. He called for a blank on which to write a telegram. Zeph, shivering on the platform and looking through the front window, made sure of this.

To the boy's mind this was the first suspicious move Jake Mund had made since he had joined the section gang to watch him.

"I've got to see that message," he thought anxiously. "And how will I do that? The operator is a German, too; and he's got a bigger mouth than ever Jake had. I've reported on him to Mr. Adair, and I shouldn't be surprised if they gathered him in when the time comes."

Of course he could send a wire to Mr. Adair and the head of the railroad police could order the operator at Coolidge to repeat Jake's message. But if this operator was disloyal he would

at once set Jake and Jake's correspondent on their guard.

As he turned these thoughts over in his mind and Jake remained within, the whistle of the approaching Western Flier startled Zeph's ear. He turned to see the headlight of the locomotive swiftly mounting the grade. The jar of the heavy train made the platform vibrate.

But the passing of the flier meant nothing to the operator and agent inside the station. The train was not scheduled to stop at Coolidge, and the signalman in the tower had given her the white board.

Zeph turned his back to the window to watch the train come through. He was the sole person on the platform.

With a furious roar and rumble the head of the flier shot by. The wind of her passage almost blinded the boy; but he saw the figure swinging on the rear step of that first Pullman as it passed him.

Zeph Dallas had a quick eye and a ready brain. He understood instantly just as well as though he had been told, what that swaying object was and how it had got there. He only wondered how it had clung to its insecure hold clear from Stanley Junction!

Somebody had tried to board the vestibuled

flier after the train had started. Once on the step, he dared not get off. And up to this point none of the train crew had seen the imperiled man.

Before the length of the next Pullman had passed, Zeph sprang to action. Not ten feet from him, and against the wall of the station building, stood a row of lanterns. Two of them were red lights, their faces carefully turned to the wall.

Zeph, with a yell of excitement, sprang for these lanterns and seized the two red ones. He turned, whirling the lamps about his head. Although the wicks were turned low, the flash of the red rays could be seen for some distance, for the station platform was not well lighted at this time of night.

The train whipped past him. The end car was gone in a moment. The suction of the tail-end almost drew Zeph under the final trucks.

But repeating yell after yell, as though his voice could be heard above the rumble of the train, the boy leaped out between the rails and still waved the lanterns madly.

He hoped for the bare chance which really did occur. A man was looking through the window of the rear door of the end car. It was the Pullman conductor himself. The gyrations of the red lights caught his eye.

Of course, a train cannot be properly signaled to a stop in any such way as this. But the conductor was too old a railroad man to take any chances. Correctly or not, somebody was madly endeavoring to stop the Western Flier. The conductor reached for the signal cord and blew a sharp blast in the engineer's ear.

The latter pulled her down without hesitation. The track was clear ahead and the signalman had given him "all clear" from the semaphore. But that order from the rear could not be safely disobeyed.

There followed four short blasts to back her, for the flier could not be stopped within an eighth of a mile. Behind the train the conductor saw those two red lamps staggering up the track. Zeph Dallas was coming as quickly as he could in the teeth of the bitter wind that blew across the ridge.

The conductor and his flagman leaped down and ran toward the boy when the train again halted.

"What's the matter?" shouted the conductor. "What do you mean, stopping this train?"

"Keep your shirt on, Mister," advised Zeph, panting. "Go up front! First Pullman. Man hanging to step. Can't get aboard. I saw him as she passed the station."

The conductor wheeled instantly and started along the train, while the flagman walked back to set out his lantern at the proper distance. Zeph, in great curiosity, trotted at the conductor's heels. Once in the shelter of the train the traveling was easier, for the cars acted as a wind-break.

He overtook the conductor, indeed, and together they reached the place where Ralph hung by his overcoat belt to the handle of the vestibule door.

"My heavens!" gasped the conductor. "The man's dead! He's frozen!"

He tried to take Ralph down. The latter's face was hidden, and so Zeph did not recognize his friend. But he leaped up beside him, flashed out his jackknife and opened it, and in a moment slashed through the belt that help Ralph lashed to the handle.

The conductor caught the figure in his arms and eased it to the ground. Then Zeph turned up the wick of one of his lanterns, and illuminated the face of the unfortunate Ralph with the ghastly light of it.

CHAPTER XXVII

HE IS GONE!

"WHO is this bird, I wonder?" the conductor fretfully inquired. "If he's dead he'll make us no end of trouble."

Zeph Dallas uttered a loud cry and dropped on his knees beside the unfortunate youth.

"Fairbanks!" he shouted.

"Who's that?" said the conductor, suspiciously eying Zeph by the light of the lantern. "You look like a wop; but you're not."

"Ralph Fairbanks!" repeated the anxious Zeph. "Don't you know him, Mister? He's the chief train dispatcher of this division."

"Get out!"

"That's who he is," declared Zeph.

"About as likely, that is, as that you are a wop," growled the conductor. "What does all this mean?"

There were people running from the direction of the station. Zeph suddenly feared publicity.

"I'm alla right, Boss," he said to the conductor. "Sure I'm a wop. But dis-a my frien', Mist'

Fairbanks. I know-a heem. He de big boss in dispatcher's office—sure!"

"Likely story!" muttered the Pullman conductor.

Ralph began to stir. He struggled to sit up and his eyes opened. But his brain was cloudy. He saw first of all Zeph's stained face and brilliant eyes bending above him. He recognized his friend instantly.

"He's in there, Zeph. Get him!" he muttered feebly.

"Who is in where?" hissed Zeph Dallas.

"In the first Pullman. Up front," Ralph gasped. *"Pringer."*

Jake Mund and the telegraph operator from the station arrived as Ralph said this. The Pullman conductor demanded:

"Either of you fellows know this chap? Is he Fairbanks, the chief dispatcher of your division?"

Jake Mund drew back in haste; but the operator thrust himself forward, eagerly replying:

"Why, I know Mr. Fairbanks! Sure that is he! How did he ever come here?"

"He must have jumped us after we left Stanley Junction. The vestibule door was locked, of course. Wonder he didn't fall off. Wonder he isn't frozen stiff. You fellows take him back to the station and thaw him out, will you?"

But Jake Mund had disappeared. The conductor looked around for Zeph.

"Where the dickens is that boy who stopped the train?"

"What boy?" asked the operator.

"The wop—or, he talks like one."

"I don't know. Didn't notice him. Where's that man who came along with me? He was just sending a message," and the operator stared about in amazement for Mund. "I've got to get back to my key."

A brakeman appeared from the open doorway of the very car Ralph had clung to so desperately. He helped the operator raise Ralph from the ground.

"Take him back to the station," commanded the conductor. "Hurry back, Jimson," he added, addressing the brakeman. "There's the engineer whistling for us. We're five minutes behind already. If that fellow's the dispatcher, don't see how he came hanging to this train."

The two men stumbled away along the cinder path with Ralph's body sagging between them. The conductor stepped up into the vestibule, the door of which the brakeman had left open, to get out of the wind. The porter appeared, his eyes rolling.

"Who dis boy in here, Mistah Conductuh?" he

chattered. "Mos' impident boy Ah evah see. An' he a Guinea boy at dat."

"What is the matter with you, Jonas?" queried the vexed conductor.

"Dis heah Guinea boy. Ah tell yo'——"

"What Guinea boy? Do you mean an Italian?"

"Yaas suh! Dat wot Ah say. A Guinea boy. He walk right intuh ma car. Ah try tuh stop him an' he say: 'Out de way, niggah! Ah's in haste. Dis heah ain' no time to fool wid me.' Jes' lak *dat,*" repeated Jonas, rolling his eyes.

"A *boy?* Why didn't you throw him out of the car?" demanded the conductor.

"Ma mercy me, Mistuh Conductuh! Don' yo' know dem Guineas carry knifes in dey shoes—an' ma razor ain' properly honed—no, suh! 'Tain' properly honed."

"You mean to say you let a strange boy walk through your car? Somebody who didn't belong aboard?" demanded the conductor with considerable anger.

"If dat Guinea boy had money fo' a ticket, hees clo'es didn't betray de fac', Mistuh Conductuh. He's a sho' 'nuff ragamuffin," said Jonas.

The conductor strode through the car, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. If the fellow who had stopped the train was the individual Jonas complained of, he proposed to

make him explain his actions and tell who and what he was.

How would a common Italian workman be so well acquainted with the chief dispatcher of this division of the G. N. system? And why had the dispatcher himself been so anxious to board this train? The conductor smelled something of moment in the air.

Nobody had as yet retired in this car, although more than half the berths were arranged for the night. The curtains were open and nobody could be hidden in the berths.

The door of the ladies' room was closed and he heard voices within. The mysterious boy could not be hidden there. A few passengers were still in the seats. In the one forward private compartment was an individual alone.

This was a fleshy man with bushy white hair and a florid face. He had a rather scrubby black mustache. There was a good deal of white powder, or the like, upon the front of his black vest.

"Did you see a boy come through here, sir?" asked the conductor. "Hey, Jonas! How was that boy dressed? In a checked shirt and a purple sweater?"

"Dat's wot he was, Mistuh Conductuh. An' de disgracefulest pants I eber see—sho' 'nuff."

"I saw no boy in here," said the passenger, speaking very exact English.

Jonas looked over the conductor's shoulder, his eyes bulging. He stared at the white-haired man as though he were a spectre.

"Come away, you old fool!" snapped the conductor. "That boy isn't here."

"Fo' de lan's sake! Fo' de lan's sake!" muttered Jonas, backing slowly away from the compartment.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Whar dat gemmen come from?" muttered Jonas. "I swar to goodness I ain' nevah seen him befo'."

The conductor snorted his disgust. "Of course he's been here all the time." He consulted his list. "That compartment has been filled since the start of the trip, Jonas. And there wasn't a soul boarded us at the Junction. I punched the ticket for this compartment long ago."

He went on and opened the door of the men's room at the extreme end of the car. But the boy who appeared to be an Italian, at least a part of the time, was not in there.

He felt a strong draft and stepped into the forward vestibule. The door was open and the conductor leaned out to look back along the length of the train. A red light was jogging up nearer

to the last car. The flagman and doubtless the other brakeman with him were hastening to return. Enough time had already been lost by the flier. The engineer was whistling impatiently for the signal to start.

"He is gone!" declared the conductor aloud, as he closed the vestibule door and came back into the warm car.

He had almost to kick the porter to get him away from the door of the forward compartment. Jonas kept muttering that he never had seen that white-haired man before.

"Get along about your work, Jonas!" ordered the conductor, and passed back through the train.

The white-haired man reached carefully and shut the door of his compartment. Then he stirred with the toe of his boot the figure concealed under the upholstered seat on which he was sitting.

"You come out may," he said gutturally. "They haf gone undt the door iss shut alretty. Now tell me," and his voice was both curious and very eager, "vot vass it yet they after you are?"

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHAT KING CANUTE SAID

Ralph Fairbanks was not unconscious when he was picked up by the brakeman and the Coolidge telegraph operator and carried between them to the station. But his mind was far from clear.

In the warm waiting room he began to recover quickly.

"Where's Zeph?" was his first muttered query.

The operator did not understand him. He said briskly:

"You're all right now, Mr. Fairbanks. Or you will be in a short time. Did you want very much to board that train? Shall I hold her for you?"

This aroused Ralph's better understanding. Much as he had desired to get aboard the Western Flier, he knew that he was unfit now for the task he had attempted. The train must not be longer delayed.

"Give her the white board," he ordered. "No further delay. I may send a message to her conductor later."

"Whenever you are ready, Mr. Fairbanks,"

said the operator, and dismissed the brakeman with a wave of the hand.

"Report back the reason for the delay of the flier to division headquarters," said Ralph, in a stronger voice, and sitting up on the settee. "I'm all right, or shall be soon."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is that fellow whom I saw when they got me off the train?" Ralph next asked.

"What fellow do you mean? There was a chap just sending a telegram when the flier pulled down. He didn't finish writing it."

"A young fellow," said Ralph.

"Don't know whom you mean. Unless it was the lad who signaled the flier. He happened to see you clinging to that door. I don't know who he was."

Ralph was thinking more clearly. He realized that the fellow who had seen him and stopped the train must have been Zeph. His faithful friend had saved his life without much doubt.

"Let me send out for something hot and strong for you to drink, Mr. Fairbanks," the operator suggested.

"Yes. Coffee. Make it both hot and strong," agreed Ralph. "You are very kind."

"Oh, not at all," said the operator, bustling into the office.

Ralph heard him call somebody on the telephone. He spoke in German. Ralph did not hear all that was said by the operator; but it was not entirely about coffee that he spoke!

"Yes. The man I told you of before."

"Yes, I tell you. He works with the section gang of Number Ten."

Then Ralph was wide awake, for the operator said something that acted like a hypodermic injection upon the dispatcher's brain:

"Mund. Yes. That's his name. He is sending a message, I tell you, to——"

Ralph did not catch the name the operator then mumbled into the transmitter. He rose to his feet, rather unsteadily it must be confessed, and approached the window of the office softly.

As he thought, judging from what he had already heard, a pad of printed telegraph forms lay on the shelf. The man the operator had spoken of had finished laboriously writing his message in English. It had to be written in that language according to the rules at present governing the company.

The pad had been turned so that the telegraph operator could read and count the words. And at just that moment, it was evident, the Western Flier had gone through and Zeph Dallas began his gyrations outside. Both the operator and the

writer of the message had run out to see what had happened.

Quick as a flash, and without attempting to read the lines written on the paper, Ralph Fairbanks tore the form from the pad, crammed it into his pocket, and swiftly and silently crossed the room to the settee again, and that without being observed at all by the telegraph operator in the office.

The plotter came out to him in a minute.

"I reckon you don't feel any too good yet, Mr. Fairbanks," he said. "The coffee will be here in a minute."

It was indeed welcome when it came, and Ralph was thankful for it. He was confident that the man he had heard the operator speaking to over the telephone was the owner of a German restaurant in the neighborhood. He made a mental note of this. The restaurant proprietor as well as the operator at Coolidge must be reckoned with.

The operator went to the telegraph shelf and seemed much excited and mystified when he could not find the sheet on which Jacob Mund had written his message. He looked about, scratched his head as though to stir his thoughts, and even went to the front door of the station and looked up and down the platform.

Ralph could read his thoughts easily. Had

Jake Mund returned and removed the written message? Perhaps he had decided not to send the message after all. The operator was plainly puzzled.

Mund did not return; but a boy came with Ralph's coffee. The beverage was both strong and hot, as ordered, and it put a feeling of new life into the train dispatcher.

Ralph Fairbanks had been through a serious experience. And Zeph had saved his life! Good old Zeph!

But now Ralph hoped with all his heart that Zeph had caught his meaning when he had first spoken to him at the car step, and would fasten upon the German agent like a leech.

Wherever Pringer was going, he should be watched. His activities must be thwarted. Mr. Bob Adair should be introduced to "Number Forty." The boldness of these traitors! Riding up and down the road as they pleased, and perhaps directing the activities of their henchmen from the private compartment of a Pullman!

Ralph showed himself able to sit up and walk after drinking the coffee. Soon a few passengers began to arrive at the station, either to take the 10:38 eastbound train, or the westbound local that arrived at Coolidge a few minutes later.

The young dispatcher thanked the operator

again and boarded the eastbound. Once in his seat, and sure that nobody could look over his shoulder, he drew forth the crumpled message that Jake Mund had written.

It was a most amazing thing, both in its substance and in the identity of the person to whom it was directed. And when Ralph had read it he was not at all sure whether Jake Mund was actively engaged in working against the Government, or that he was just an ordinary man, much troubled by his own private affairs.

In the first place, the telegram he had written but had not sent was addressed to Chief Rhinemeyer of the Stanley Junction police!

Ralph had been wondering much regarding the chief of police. He, too, had a distinctly German name. Mr. Bob Adair had said nothing regarding his considered loyalty and Ralph had not asked. But he knew the man by sight and had found him to be a young, brisk, and distinctly American-looking individual; and he learned that he governed the Stanley Junction police force with an iron hand.

Surely the message Mund had written to the chief expressed nothing of a sinister nature. Unless it was in some code that the police chief would understand:

"Can you square it with railroad? I want work in roundhouse. Outside work in winter too much is.—J. MUND."

"Now, is Mund a traitor, or is he not? On the face of this message it would seem that he knows Rhinemeyer and that he is actually only a thick-headed fellow who pulled a bonehead play that time he ditched One Thousand One, and wants to get back into a warm job for the winter.

"If he is innocent of any wrong intent, then he merely got scared and ran away from the Junction. And now he hopes a man with the chief's influence may be able to get him back on the road. I'll see what Rhinemeyer says."

But, as soon as he got into his office the following morning, Ralph wrote a particular account of his evening's adventure and his sight of Pringer, the German agent, to Mr. Bob Adair, quoting, as well, Mund's message to Rhinemeyer. He hoped to hear from Zeph; but nothing stirred from that direction.

At lunch time he walked across town to the City Hall and went to the police chief's office.

The chief proved to be an affable man, and not too old to be enthusiastic. He got up to shake hands with Ralph and then waved him to a chair.

"I've heard of you, Fairbanks," he said. "My

friend Billy Bradley told me you were some sharp-eyed sleuth. It was you who saw the bunch of dynamite on the track of the interurban that night, and retrieved it just in time to postpone indefinitely the blowing up of the School Street bridge. That was a close call, Mr. Fairbanks."

"It was a close call for one of our trains, sir," admitted Ralph. "By the way, has nothing ever been discovered about the identity of the rascals who placed the explosives there?"

"I'm not at liberty to say, exactly," Chief Rhinemeyer declared. "There are suspects being watched; but we've got no conclusive evidence."

That was no answer, and Ralph grew suspicious again. It might be that the chief of police was too much like Sheriff Greber, and thought more of politics than of the safety of the railroad and those that the railroad carried.

"Now, what can I do for you, Mr. Fairbanks?" asked Rhinemeyer.

Ralph had already made up his mind regarding the course his questions would take. He asked:

"Do you know a man named Jacob Mund?"

The chief repeated the name thoughtfully. Either he was a good actor or he really was doubtful of the matter.

"I am not sure. 'Jacob Mund'? What does he do?"

"Works on section gang Number Ten at Coolidge just now."

"I know nobody up there," Rhinemeyer said promptly.

"He used to be in town here. A regular German. Can't speak English much, I tell you," Ralph added, watching the chief closely. "He worked in our roundhouse and he pulled a bonehead play there and got out."

"Hold on there! Is he the man that turned the new locomotive of yours into the roundhouse and broke out the brick wall?" and he grinned.

"That is the man."

"Jake Mund!" chuckled Chief Rhinemeyer. "I remember him now. That's just about the sort of thing he would do if he got excited. I got him the job at the roundhouse myself."

"You did?"

"Yes. He came here to town a stranger and he worked for me awhile. Shaved the lawn, and trimmed hedges, and made our garden. You know, these Germans are usually handy about such work.

"He seemed a decent fellow, so I got him a steady job in the roundhouse. I suppose he got scared and lit out after the accident."

"If it was an accident," said Ralph pointedly.

"Oh, pshaw! You couldn't accuse Jake Mund

of being smart enough to have done that thing intentionally? You are not bitten with the idea, are you, Mr. Fairbanks, that every accident that happens about your yard is caused by pro-Germans and spies?"

"I know that there have been an unusual number of queer things happening of late," the young fellow said noncommittally, "and that we can't put our hands on the men who are at fault. Now, this Jake Mund; have you not heard from him of late?"

"Good gracious, no! Why should I hear from him?" queried the chief of police sharply.

Ralph drew forth the message he had taken from the Coolidge office the night before and put it in front of Rhinemeyer without a word. The latter stared at it, and then his big, smoothly shaven face began to flush.

"How is this?" he demanded sharply. "Is your company holding up messages intended for me?"

Ralph explained quietly how he gained possession of the message that really had not been sent by telegraph after all.

"I would like to know if you consider this Mund all right, really," Ralph said. "If he is, he can come back to the Junction. I will fix it for him."

And he might have added that he would see,

likewise, that a sharp watch was kept on Jake Mund if he returned. Perhaps it would be better to have the man near at hand after all, if a round-up of suspects was to be made by Mr. Bob Adair in the near future.

"Oh, I'll write the poor fish," said Rhinemeyer carelessly. "He's perfectly harmless, Mr. Fairbanks."

"I wonder if you are perfectly harmless, too," muttered Ralph, as he retired from the chief of police's office.

He came back from his luncheon to the train dispatchers' office to find upon his desk pad a torn bit of brown paper. It was pinned to the pad so that it could not be blown away and he would be sure to see it.

"What is this?" Ralph demanded aloud, pouncing upon the paper.

Written in German script, in the same handwriting as that of the message which had entered his window in the paper torpedo, were these words:

"What King Canute Said to the Tide."

CHAPTER XXIX

IT COMES TO A HEAD

THIS astonishing message on Ralph Fairbanks' desk struck the young chief dispatcher as being not only a threat, but a warning. He remembered clearly the way the first message read:

> "What Canute said to the tide we say to the United States Government and the Great Northern troop trains."

That old threat had been the forerunner of danger to an army train passing over this division. Ralph sank slowly into his chair after reading this brief notice pinned to his desk pad, and reached for his telephone. He asked to be connected with President Grant.

This was no matter to be reported to Glidden. He would have to go over the division manager's head, and, as the superintendent was not at his desk, Ralph felt that he must get in touch with the president of the system.

The latter's secretary answered the telephone

call when finally the connection was vouchsafed the train dispatcher. Ralph had to make it plain to the secretary who he was and that his business with President Grant was urgent.

Finally he heard the president's voice on the wire:

"Mr. Fairbanks, at Stanley Junction?"

"Yes, Mr. Grant. I wish to know if you are informed as to when the first army train will come through?"

"What's that?" gasped the president, and Ralph knew by the tone of his voice that he was startled. "What are you saying?"

"I've got to say it," Ralph told him earnestly. "There is something about to come off. I have had another warning."

"Heavens, Fairbanks! This is too much!" exclaimed President Grant. "I have only just now received word myself from the military authorities that the movement of troops over our system will begin to-morrow morning. The first train ought to reach your division at six-thirty A. M., or thereabout. I was just dictating instructions to dispatchers and all other heads to be on guard."

"The enemy know it, then," muttered Ralph.

"What's that you say?" demanded the president at the other end of the wire.

"You know how I was warned before," said Ralph quietly. "This message is of a similar nature. I can't make out whether it comes from the enemy itself or—or, well, a friendly enemy."

"I will get in touch with Adair," promised President Grant. "Be on the watch, Fairbanks. We shall expect you to see that the trains—I don't know how many there will be—get over your division without mishap."

"I will do my best, sir."

"You know the threat has been made that none of them will get through. Some of the German language papers have openly printed such stuff. We've got to show 'em."

"We will show 'em, sir!" declared Ralph emphatically.

The president rang off. Ralph sat deep in thought for some minutes. Finally he unpinned the brief note, and with it in his hand went to see John Glidden in his office.

On the way he chanced to pass Otto at work with broom and dustpan. He secretly watched the German lad. The latter was very pale, and Ralph caught him following his course with sly regard.

"I believe we are going to catch you, my boy," murmured the chief dispatcher, "whether you are enemy or friend. You're into it up to your neck.

And I wonder if your uncle isn't one of the conspirators likewise."

As soon as he had told Glidden of the expected forwarding of troops over the division, the manager and he "went into executive session." They had previously discussed what should be done in preparation for the handling of these important trains.

The yardmasters, tower signalmen, roundhouse bosses, engine masters, and even the section bosses all along the division, were to have especially prepared instructions.

Nobody knew yet how many troop trains there would be, or how fast they would be delivered to the division. But the schedule of regular passenger and freight trains had to be arranged so that certain trains could be sidetracked at any time to allow of the passage of the Government trains.

In the first place, too, the very best and fastest engines must be made ready for taking over the troop trains when they reached Stanley Junction. In crossing the Mountain Division from the Junction to Rockton several hours would be saved, and the troop trains were to be delivered to the Southern Stem of the G. N. system.

Ralph and Glidden decided upon many of these important points; but the engine master, of course, chose the locomotives to pull the troop trains. It

was announced to Ralph that No. 1001 would be ready at six in the morning, and her crew on hand, to couple on to the first Government train.

That night was a busy one and an anxious one all along the division. Ralph went home on the owl car of the interurban. As they rolled down the School Street hill he and Billy Bradley again discussed the finding of the dynamite under the bridge at the foot of the descent so many weeks before.

"Bet you, Fairbanks," said the motorman, "I never drive the old car under this arch without thinking of that bundle of dynamite. Whew, if we'd hit it!"

Ralph could not sleep much, late as the hour was when he got to bed. He awoke frequently with that terrible feeling of disaster that sometimes haunts one's dreams. There was a pressure about his heart, too. He wondered if that feeling was physical or mental.

Of late he had quite forgotten the doctors' warning to him. He had been too busy to worry much whether he had heart trouble or not.

He was up long before his mother roused that morning, spoke to her softly at the door of her room, and went back to town without waiting for breakfast. He told her he would get a bite before going to the office; but he really forgot it

when the early car deposited him at City Square.

He was hurrying toward the railroad offices and the station when he caught sight of Jenks, the engineer of No. 1001, dinner bucket and overall suit in hand, making in the same direction. He, at least, was going to be on hand early to see that his locomotive was ready for the important run.

Ralph quickened his steps and was about to hail the engineer when a swiftly but almost silently running touring car turned a corner into the square, and bore down on both pedestrians.

The young chief dispatcher leaped back and cleared the rushing juggernaut. He flashed a glance at the occupants of the car and saw that one of the two men in the tonneau was known to him.

It was Pringer, the German agent!

The discovery, however, was dwarfed the next instant by something that happened. The chauffeur of the swift car swerved his machine—was it intentionally done?—and Jenks, the locomotive engineer, was hit!

With a scream of pain the man was rolled over and over toward the gutter. The car swept on and disappeared up another street. It was as deliberate a piece of fiendishness as Ralph Fairbanks had ever witnessed.

The few persons stirring so early in City Square ran to the scene of the accident—if accident it could be honestly called. Ralph saw the door of the chief of police's home open and Rhinemeyer come out.

"Who saw the number of that car?" he cried. "Who was in it? The scoundrels! They deliberately ran the old man down."

Ralph would not reply. He bent over the groaning Jenks.

"They got me, Mr. Fairbanks!" murmured the engineer. "It's my leg, I never can drive that train this day."

"Don't fret," Ralph assured him. "I'll find a man to take your place. What's this?"

Around the corner which the recklessly driven car had turned came rushing another automobile. A man with a gray beard was in the tonneau. Ralph thought he recognized him.

Rhinemeyer leaped into the street and held up his hand. The car was braked and came to an abrupt stop. The chief of police exchanged a few words with the gray-bearded man, then opened the door of the tonneau and leaped in.

"We'll catch him!" Rhinemeyer shouted, and the car started again.

To Ralph's amazement somebody sitting beside the chauffeur of this car rose up and waved his

hand to him. It was a person in a purple sweater and with an old faded cap pulled well down over his ears.

"Zeph!" muttered Ralph. "And that other man is Mr. Baird of the Secret Service. They are on the trail of Pringer at last!"

Somebody had rung in a call for the hospital ambulance. Ralph did not wait for it to appear. He had already assured Jenks that the accident should be reported and a substitute for the right hand bench of No. 1001 would be found.

But when Ralph saw the engine master, who was on duty at the station, he found that to get another engineer was not so easily accomplished. To get a substitute for Jenks out of the regular force would mean to rob some other locomotive crew.

This robbing Peter to pay Paul would do much harm. An engineer and his fireman usually know each other's ways and learn to work together. To throw a new man in with Carraway would be bad enough. To break up other important crews on the division did not seem to be the part of wisdom.

"I could put Carraway on the right side of the cab and find a fireman in the roundhouse for any ordinary run. But this is particular, Mr. Fairbanks."

"I believe you," agreed the train dispatcher. "Carraway hasn't the experience."

"That's so. But where——"

"Right here, if you can't find a better man," Ralph said briskly.

"You, Mr. Fairbanks? You mean that you'll take the first troop train through?" cried the boss.

"Exactly. If you'll let me. I have studied that machine of Jenks' a little. I think Carraway and I will make out."

"By George!" shouted the engine master, "I wouldn't ask for a better man. Go to it, sir! If anybody can get that train over the division, and in safety, it is you who can do it, Ralph Fairbanks!"

CHAPTER XXX

ON THE ARMY TRAIN

At 6:14 a message came over the wire stating that the first army train, section one of No. 68, was scheduled to arrive at Stanley Junction in fifteen minutes. The sections would come along under twenty minutes or half an hour headway until all the troops had passed.

Engines would be changed in the yard. The army trains were not to halt at the station, although a crowd of people was already gathered on the platform. Bob Adair's uniformed police kept all but railroad employees out of the yard.

Even those who were not at that time engaged around the roundhouse, or belonged to the locomotive crews, were kept at a distance. The car cleaners, for instance, were allowed no nearer the main track than the rip track.

All down the yard were strung the police, and when the long train later rolled in with the khaki-clad figures crowded at the windows and on the platform, the travelers saw nothing but a very quiet Junction.

Early as the hour was, Otto Smith, as he preferred to be called, was busy about the train dispatchers' offices. Ralph caught sight of him several times peering out of the window and down into the yard. He was fully as excited as anybody else about the place, and the chief dispatcher wondered if the German boy had been communicating with any of the conspirators again.

For, in spite of all, Ralph Fairbanks had a feeling that Otto knew more than he should about the activities of the plotters who had done so much to hurt the railroad and to thwart the G. N.'s handling of the Government trains.

Suddenly he missed Otto. The boy had disappeared like a wraith. Ralph was about to make some search of the offices when warning of the approach of the first section of the troop train came over the wire.

The moment the train was announced Ralph shook John Glidden's hand and ran down to the roundhouse. Carraway had watched the grooming of No. 1001, and Ralph knew the fireman could be trusted to make sure that everything about the big engine was in perfect condition.

Ralph pulled on a suit of overalls and climbed into the cab. He found Jenks' gloves in his box under the seat, and put them on. Carraway got

up and looked at the fire. No. 1001 was steaming splendidly.

This big machine was almost the last word in locomotive construction. Carraway's work was made easy for him; but on this hilly division of the G. N. such a locomotive could not have been properly handled without two firemen, one to spell the other, had it not been for the up-to-date mechanical locomotive stoker with which it was supplied.

Getting the signal, Ralph reached quickly and let the steam into the cylinders. The locomotive began to roll. They steamed down the yard. The soldiers in the several cars looked out curiously at the big locomotive and her crew.

"I wonder if they are thinking at all of the responsibility on our shoulders?" thought Ralph. "It's up to us to get them through without mishap."

He ran the locomotive onto the main track, and then backed to couple to the first car. Immediately an officer stepped aboard the locomotive.

"I'm stationed here, Engineer," said the military man. "Not in your way, am I?"

"No, sir. The fireman will give you part of his cushion."

"But what's this?" demanded the army man a moment later. "Have we got a stowaway?"

Ralph craned his head around the front of the boiler to see, while Carraway uttered an emphatic expletive. The fireman dived for the wriggling legs of somebody under his seat.

"Haul that fellow out, Carraway!" commanded Ralph. "I'll give him to the police—— No, I won't!"

For when he saw who it was, the young dispatcher remembered what both Mr. Bob Adair and Mr. Baird, the secret service man, had said of Otto. Otto it was, shaking, half-tearful, a picture of fright.

"What are you doing here?" Ralph demanded harshly. "This is a boy from my office," he explained to the military officer. "Come here, Otto."

Carraway jerked the boy around and pushed him toward the engineer's seat.

The blast of the whistle over Ralph's head at that moment assured him that the conductor of the train had shouted "All aboard!" Ralph coaxed her forward with almost no jar at all. The long train rumbled out of the yard.

He knew the road so well that scarcely a joint could be retamped along the division without his knowing it. Ralph's vision was fixed ahead as closely, however, as though this was his first run.

The mechanism of the locomotive under his hand responded beautifully to his action. He spurred No. 1001 as a jockey speeds his mount. Faster and faster he urged the pace until the engine struck the grade and began to labor up it, drawing her long train even then at a commendable speed.

For a week every section gang had been making the way especially safe for the troop trains. They had orders this morning to keep off the line until after the specials had passed through.

But every few rods Ralph saw a grimly earnest man standing beside the right-of-way. Not all were armed and uniformed; but he knew that they were all answerable to Mr. Bob Adair for the safety of the train's passing.

The army train crossed the top of the ridge at Coolidge without stopping. There were groups of people standing about, but at some distance from the tracks. There was no demonstration of any kind made by these spectators.

Down the mountainside they sped, where Ralph on the gasoline speeder had been chased by the six freight cars, running wild. They made excellent time to Valley Stream where they had to stop for water.

The signalman from the tower sent Ralph down a flimsy. It read:

"Come on! We're ready for you.—B. A."

This was not a threat, but a promise. He knew that Bob Adair had done his best to make the way safe for the train; but had he succeeded? How much did Otto know that Bob Adair ought to know?

Much troubled by the thought, the young dispatcher scribbled hastily a telegram to be sent in answer to the one he had just received from the chief of the railroad police:

"Meet 1001 if possible. Got King Canute with me.—FBX."

He believed Adair would see the significance of the phrase he used. Ralph had no time now to wring information out of Otto. And he did not want to get the lad into trouble with the military authorities.

The officer on the other side of the cab thought the appearance of Otto on the locomotive spelled merely a boy's desire to be in the thick of things. Ralph's explanation that Otto worked in the railroad offices was sufficient for him. It was not his business to say who should ride in the engine cab.

The first section of No. 68 pulled out of Valley

Stream in safety. One of the wildest parts of the division was ahead of them.

If at any point the enemy would strive to work harm to the train, Ralph Fairbanks felt it would be within the next fifty miles.

Stations were few and far between, and were mostly flag stations. The territory was but sparsely inhabited. The mountaineers, as a class, were ignorant, and there were some criminals hiding out in the hills on both sides of the railroad line.

Ralph and Zeph Dallas had learned something personally about these people when they were seeking the lost pay car, as related in detail in "Ralph, the Train Dispatcher."

There were men in these mountains who could be hired for the commission of almost any crime. The taking of human life filled them with no great horror. If the conspirators dared not attempt the wreck of the troop train themselves, they might easily find somebody who, for a few dollars, would risk his life in doing that very thing.

Never, in all his experience as fireman and engineer of a fast express, had Ralph Fairbanks been more alert than at this time and on this important run. No. 1001 was steaming beautifully; the tripping wheels over the railjoints made a musical clatter; everything seemed working out

nicely to a pacific finish of the run. And yet he felt a premonition of danger.

The engineer always works under a certain strain. A loosened bolt—a fault in an axle—a split rail-end—any of these accidents or one of a hundred others might bring the heavy army train to wreck and ruin!

The course of the road likewise added to the danger. There were places where the high cliffs towered over the right-of-way. A boulder poised far up on some height might roll down on the tracks and either bar the passing of the train or wreck it entirely.

There were places, too, where the tracks followed the brink of a chasm in the mountainside. An avalanche here would sweep the train into the depths.

And despite the watchful care of Bob Adair's men, any or all of these accidents were possible. Ralph did not alone search the lines of rails ahead with apprehensive eyes; he threw many an anxious glance to the heights and into the patches of thick forest that in places bordered the railway.

He listened, too, for any strange sound that might rise through the rhythmic drumming of the wheels. His ear, long since attuned to the ordinary "song of the rail," sensed easily a new or foreign strain.

Finally it came! He heard it while No. 68 was making good time between Forestlawn and Belden. The right-of-way passed through a forest which towered on either hand, so dark and thick that unless the sun was near the zenith the way was almost as dark as a tunnel.

Ralph Fairbanks' hand reached for the proper lever and he shut off steam. He did not brake his engine, for the pressure of brakeshoes upon the wheels is to be avoided if possible at all times.

Carraway leaped across the deck to cry: "What is it, Mr. Fairbanks? What d'you see? All clear on *my* side."

The army officer was wide awake, too. Ralph could feel Otto trembling at his shoulder.

"Listen!" commanded the engineer, with hand raised commandingly.

Out of the gloom ahead, drawing nearer with every revolution of the wheels, sounded an echoing *chuck! chuck! chuck!* It had nothing to do with the running of a train, Ralph Fairbanks well knew.

CHAPTER XXXI

INTERFERENCE

For more than a mile Ralph had not seen a railroad guard. That might not mean that there were none on duty; merely one had not shown himself beside the right-of-way as the army train rolled by.

The sound ahead was one that the engineer identified within a few seconds. Its source was the resonant blows of an axman; the blade of the tool was biting deeply into hard wood, and it was being used by a master hand.

"What's that noise?" demanded the officer riding on the locomotive.

"Woodchopper, by George!" cried Carraway, likewise recognizing the sound.

The locomotive was only moving as fast as the weight of the cars pushed it. They rolled around a curve, and the next moment the scene of the woodsman's activities came into view.

"Pull her down!" yelled Carraway, vastly excited by what he saw.

Otto screamed in fright. The officer jerked his

pistol from its holster and drew instant bead on the red-shirted individual who swung the ax just above the right-of-way.

"Hold on! Don't shoot!" commanded Ralph.

But the army man swung himself down to the locomotive step on the fireman's side of the cab, shouting:

"Hands up! Drop that ax! You sink her once again into that tree-butt and I'll just fill you full of lead!"

His weapon was a wicked-looking automatic pistol. A single pressure of the trigger finger and eight bullets would be released, and in the twinkling of an eye.

"Hold on! Don't shoot!" begged Ralph Fairbanks for a second time.

No. 1001 had come to a groaning stop. Hundreds of heads were popped out of the car windows; but, according to orders, nobody got down.

The soldiers saw the officer up ahead holding what appeared to be a most surprised and innocent woodsman at bay. His hands were in the air. He stood beside a tree he had been felling, its trunk all of eighteen inches through.

The great scar made by his ax-blade already yawned more than half way through the tree trunk. The top of the tall tree weaved back and forth, tottering to its fall.

And to all appearances when the tree fell it would crash across the railroad right-of-way, to bar the passing of the troop train, or to fall upon that train if it were moving!

Had No. 1001, with its long string of closely packed coaches, been speeded up instead of stopped by Ralph Fairbanks, they might have pulled safely beyond the threatening tree. Now to attempt to pull ahead would be to court certain disaster. The fibers of the cleft wood were already cracking as the tree swayed.

Commanding Otto to remain with the fireman, Ralph leaped from the engine step and followed the angry officer. The latter plowed through the brush beside the right-of-way, reached the woodchopper, and thrust his threatening weapon into the fellow's face.

"You're my prisoner!" he declared. "Another minute and you would have felled that tree across the railroad and there would have been an accident. Are you aware of what you were doing, or are you just one particular kind of a blamed fool?"

The woodchopper was a spare, wiry fellow, about forty years of age. He was typical of the mountains, and Ralph believed he had seen him before. The man's cool grin, and his glance upward at the swaying treetop seemed to signify that

he considered that his work—such as it was—had been accomplished.

Ralph laid a hand upon the officer's arm. The latter looked at him for a moment as though he considered this interference impudent. But the train dispatcher was not to be awed so easily.

"Let's get at this," he said quickly. Then he asked the mountaineer: "How came you to be chopping this tree down?"

"Told to do it, Squire," drawled the fellow.

"Who by?"

"Dunno the gent's name, Squire. Hired me this here mawnin'. Told me to cut down a hull row of 'em——"

"On railroad property?" interrupted Ralph sharply.

"'Tain't railroad property," replied the woodchopper, grinning. "I know whar the line runs all right. This feller's got timber rights through this track."

"You know better!" snapped the officer. "You're under arrest. We'll find out who it was hired you."

"Dunno's you will, Mister," drawled the man.

"We'll sweat it out of you!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Ralph again. "We're wasting time, and endangering our chance of getting the train through. "Look here, you!"

"All right, Squire," said the man easily.

"You're Hank Bowers—I know you. There's something hanging over you from away back. You were mixed up with that man Rivers."

The man's face paled. Ralph referred to an outlaw who had bothered the Great Northern some time before. The man called Hank Bowers stepped back.

"Keep 'em up!" ordered the army man, who had lowered his pistol when Ralph began to talk. He shoved the muzzle of the weapon into Hank Bowers' ribs.

"Pick up that ax," said Ralph sternly. "Let him get it, please. He's got to finish his job. The tree must fall."

"Great heavens, Fairbanks!" exclaimed the army man, "you'll block the train. If the tree falls across the tracks——"

"If it does fall across the right-of-way you have my permission to shoot Hank Bowers on the spot —if you want to," declared Ralph grimly.

"Why, say, Squire, I can't help——"

"Hush!" commanded Ralph. "Put your ax to the tree. This side! Don't have any funny business. I know how to fell that tree just as well as you do; but you have begun the job and you finish it. Quick, now, before she's torn off the stump."

"But he'll delay the train!" exclaimed the army man, not understanding.

"No he won't," snapped Ralph. "He's going to wedge the top of this tree in that one yonder—d'you see? Get to work, Bowers! Half a dozen strokes will do it. And you see that they are delivered right."

Hank Bowers was cowed. He judged the position of the other tree Ralph had indicated with his eye, stepped around the trunk of the one he had partly felled, and delivered several quick, sure strokes.

The tottering tree cracked, groaned, and with a splintering crash the tall trunk leaned over, but parallel with instead of across the tracks. Its top was caught in the top of another forest monarch, and there it lurched and swayed, its branches so closely entangled with those of the standing tree that there was little danger of its falling to the ground.

"All right!" cried Ralph. "Danger's all over! Back to the engine, or the second section of Sixty-Eight will be on top of us."

"By heavens, Mr. Fairbanks!" ejaculated the army officer, "you have a quick eye and plenty of mother-wit. I'm proud to know you. But this fellow——"

"Better bring him along," shouted Ralph from

the step of the engine. "Bob Adair will want to see him, if your crowd don't."

"Oh, I guess he'll be an army prisoner for a while," said the officer grimly. Then to the prisoner: "March!" and he drove him down the embankment at the point of his pistol.

Carraway was already whistling in the flag. Ten minutes had been lost. No. 1001 pulled out of the place and began to make time. Ralph wanted to make up the loss as soon as possible. It was his pride to keep a train he drove on schedule, and he was particularly desirous of making a good running with this troop train.

" 'What Canute said to the tide,' " he muttered. "I'll show 'em that I can beat Canute. They chose a boomerang quotation that time. The tide didn't stop for Canute—and neither will the Great Northern stop at the command of a lot of traitorous scoundrels."

Then he turned to look back at the white-faced Otto and demanded:

"Did you know that was going to happen?"

"Oh, no, sir, Misder Fairbanks! I didn't know nottin' about it yet," whined Otto.

"But you thought they were going to try to blow up this engine?"

"*Ja, Ja!* I heardt dem say so——"

"Heard who?" shot in Ralph.

"I don't dare tell you, Misder Fairbanks," groaned Otto.

At that moment the train swept past Belden. There was nobody in sight but an old man smoking a corncob pipe and sprawled out upon a bench.

Ralph knew the old fellow to be the representative of the railroad at this point. There was no operator, and trains seldom halted at the place.

But it surprised Ralph to see nobody else about. None of the scattered neighbors were on hand to see the troop trains pass; nor was there anybody in sight who represented the railroad police.

For at least five miles none of Bob Adair's men had shown up beside the right-of-way to watch the troops go by. And this in the very wildest part of the division!

If the enemy could engage Hank Bowers to fell that tree and halt the first section of the army train, or wreck it, why could they not have others of his ilk in their employ? The mountaineers might have been engaged to attack and remove from the vicinity of the line all of the men Adair had set to watch the road. Some determined attempt might yet be made to wreck the train Ralph was running.

Not alone was he becoming puzzled. He was greatly worried. Several miles ahead lay Lap-

ham. There was a telegraph key there, and the young dispatcher determined to telegraph both forward and back about the missing guards.

The army officer had taken his prisoner into the forward car and had not returned. Carraway was clearing his fire at the grate. A glance now and then at the dial assured Ralph that he had all the steam he needed.

The train was climbing a rise. Just ahead was another sweeping curve in the road. Because of her load, Ralph did not have to pull No. 1001 down for this curve.

But as they swept around it Carraway, who had full vision of what was ahead, yelled across the boiler:

"Down! Down! Pull her down!"

The next moment Ralph felt the locomotive balk at some collision, and he saw the short stack bend back and crack, then it was torn completely from its cast iron rim!

He reversed and gave her the air with one motion. The wreck of the smoke-stack was dragged the length of the boiler and the glass of the cab windows crashed all about him.

CHAPTER XXXII

A DESPERATE ENCOUNTER—CONCLUSION

RALPH FAIRBANKS realized instantly, even while the locomotive was bucking like a wild mustang, just what had happened.

The smokestack had been torn off the engine boiler by a wire cable stretched from tree to tree across the right-of-way.

The plunging locomotive forced its way on without leaving the rails, and the taut cable impinged upon the face of the cab. The windows were smashed, but the strength of the cab's framework and the push of the slowing train was too much for the wire. It snapped, each end curling about the tree to which it was tied, slashing the bark to ribbons.

That the train was mounting a grade, too, helped at this juncture. None of the wheels left the track. Ralph instantly released the automatic brakes so as to ease the thundering wheels.

And at that moment, from out of the woods

on either side of the tracks, appeared at least a dozen men. They were armed with rifles and revolvers. They made a rush for the engine and tender, now all but brought to a stop.

The absence of the army officer in charge of the troops at this moment was critical. Neither Ralph nor his fireman was armed, and all that Otto did was to squeal and dive under the engineer's bench.

Each man in the attacking party was masked. But by their dress and by their voices Ralph knew them to be outlaws from the mountains, probably hired by German money to perform this criminal act.

They swarmed upon the locomotive and tender in half a minute. Swinging on from either side, some of the men held both Ralph and Carraway under their guns. Others leaped upon the tender at the rear and broke the connection between that and the train.

"Pull ahead!" roared the man at Ralph Fairbanks' side, waving his rifle threateningly.

The young fellow had to obey. Instantly he foresaw just what would happen. He was sorry, indeed, that he had released the airbrakes.

Had he not done this the locked wheels would have held the train in its place, even on this incline. Now, the moment the holding power of the locomotive, as well as that of the brakes, was

withdrawn, the troop train began to run backward down the hill.

The soldiers and their officers did not realize what was going on until this occurred. Then they began to swarm out of the cars, rifles in hand. Only a few got off, however, for the wheels were soon rolling too fast.

The squad that disembarked quickly ran together and took orders from an officer. They prepared to fire upon the mountaineers clinging to the locomotive and tender.

Yet if they discharged their rifles indiscriminately at the outlaws, they would endanger the lives of Ralph and his companions in the locomotive cab. Besides, under the urge of the commander of the masked band, the engineer now began to speed up the crippled locomotive. In a few seconds No. 1001 was out of the range of rifle shot, and only a scattering volley followed the engine as it steamed up the hill.

It was, indeed, a serious predicament; but Ralph Fairbanks could do nothing at that moment to aid the trainload of troops. There were plenty of them to get at the handbrakes and ease the speed of the heavy train.

Ahead, and before the captured engine reached the summit of the grade, he heard the whistle of a coming locomotive. Ralph's keen memory was

searched instantly for the number of this coming train. There was none eastbound at this hour scheduled to meet and pass No. 68 right here.

He had a spasm of hope. If it was a special coming, it might be Bob Adair and some of his guards. In spite of the urging of the armed man at his back, Ralph pulled his engine down.

"Git on! Git on!" commanded the mountaineer, sticking the muzzle of his gun into Ralph's ribs.

"I can't make her go any faster uphill, man!" snapped the young fellow. "And she won't steam good anyhow with her stack broken off."

"We thought that cable would ditch her," remarked the outlaw callously. "It ought to have done it."

Ralph made no reply. Had he been able to do it, he would have turned on this scoundrel and thrown him from the locomotive's deck.

Another shriek of the train whistle ahead, and No. 1001 began to wheeze and pant. Carraway had shut off the coal supply, and the needle of the steam dial was sinking rapidly.

"Git on! Git on!" yelled the leader of the mountaineers.

Around the curve ahead appeared the front of a big camelback. She drew two closed freight cars and was coming fast. But when the lone

engine was spied by her crew, the freight engine was pulled down and she slid over the brink of the grade and came down upon the runaway more slowly.

Almost at once, too, rifle fire began from the cabs of the camelback, and from her tender. Several heads appeared, and the outlaws began to return the fire. Their shooting was only half-hearted, however, and their leader commanded Ralph to halt.

Before the wheels of No. 1001 ceased to roll, the mountaineers alighted and retired, still shooting in a desultory fashion, into the woods. Out of the two cars swarmed a band of armed men, and to Ralph Fairbanks' amazement their leader was the huge and red-faced Greber, sheriff of the county!

The sheriff and a part of his men followed the separated band of outlaws in two parties. The rest ran on with the special to see if anything had happened to the troop train.

Across the tracks came a man, and leaped into Ralph's side of the cab, the sight of whom delighted the young fellow.

"Mr. Adair!" he cried. "I am mighty glad to see you!"

"Been having something of a rumpus, haven't you, Fairbanks?" demanded the chief of the rail-

road police. "Have they wrecked your nice new engine again?"

"Not so badly. I want to run on to Papham—it's only half a mile now—and get a barrel to take the place of my broken stack. Say, this old mill certainly is fated to get some hard knocks, isn't she, Carraway?"

"You said it!" growled the fireman, at work on his fire once more.

Adair grinned when he saw the frightened Otto, and he ordered him to get over on the fireman's seat.

"I thought that Sheriff Greber said we couldn't get 'em through?" suggested Ralph, but without looking over his shoulder.

"Greber's changed his tune. I told him he would. He was just one of these thick-headed fellows who think they know more than anybody else on earth. But he is singing small now."

"How is that?"

"The Secret Service men showed him a few things. Last night matters came to a head. We took him with us, and rounded up forty-seven of his neighbors and took them to jail. There really was a plan to plant bombs along the line and blow up the right-of-way for rods and rods. The confounded Heinies had declared the troops should not be moved through this county.

"Greber has come awake," said the railroad detective with satisfaction. "He has found out, too, that he has the power to balk the work of malcontents and arrest criminals *before* actual crime is committed.

"There has been a general searching of souls in this community. People are beginning to realize that we really are at war, and that spies of the most malignant kind are working among us. Now, that Number Forty——"

"He was in the junction this morning," Ralph interrupted. "His automobile ran down the engineer of this very locomotive. That's why I happen to be on the run."

"I heard all about that," Adair said. "Baird was after him, and has caught him. He was the high mogul about here; bossed all the Heinies who were working for the *'Vaterland.'* We'll put Mr. Pringer through, and don't you forget it."

"I'm glad of that," murmured Ralph, as he halted No. 1001 at Lapham.

Carraway quickly found a barrel and it was fixed in place. This enabled the fire to draw properly and kept the smoke out of the faces of those in the cab.

"Our friend, Zeph Dallas," chuckled Adair, as the engine began to back down the line, "had his

finger in the pie, too. You knew, did you, that he took up your task of apprehending Pringer on the Western Flier the other night?"

"I hoped so."

"He turned the trick," Adair said. "Yes, sir. Found the scoundrel right in the car where you thought you'd seen him. But by that time Pringer had changed his appearance. He had a habit of doing that. That's why he could go back and forth and communicate with his men at various places along the line without our getting on to him."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Ralph.

"Sure thing!"

"I suppose I should have suspected that from something Mr. Baird said when he was interviewing Otto."

"Yep. As a white-haired old man with his mustache blacked, Zeph discovered him. The smart boy made Pringer think he had done something which had set the police on his trail; so Number Forty at once tried to use Zeph.

"That chance enabled us to get the goods on Pringer, which even Pelly couldn't do——"

"Pelly!" cried Ralph in amazement.

"Oh, yes, Pelly's been one of my men ever since he came to Stanley Junction. Once he tried to get into Pringer's employ. But the German

suspected him for some reason and the business fell through. Zeph, however, got the goods on Pringer.

"Between the police and me and the Secret Service men, there will be a general clean-up of suspects all along the line to-day."

"Does that mean Otto and his uncle?" asked Ralph, with interest.

"I've got a line on Mund. He's all right. Rhinemeyer, who is to be trusted in every particular, has sent for Mund and will get him work in Stanley Junction. Although the fellow is one of the sore-heads over the war, he is a peaceable chap. And I guess he has learned to keep his mouth shut. He tells Rhinemeyer he had no idea he was going to wreck this engine when he switched her into the roundhouse that time. The poor innocent! He thought the roundhouse wall would stop it!"

"And Otto?" asked Ralph, when Adair had had his laugh out.

"You should know about him," the chief detective said, chuckling again. "He hasn't much more brains than his uncle, I guess. Otto is friendly with those Schwartzchilds and Blums up on the cliffs. He hears a good deal of what is going on."

"But those notes I received?" demanded Ralph

wonderingly. "What would Otto know about King Canute?"

"Let's have him over here," Adair said, while the engine slid easily down the incline. He shouted for the German boy, who came across to the engineer's side, looking scared as usual.

"Look here, Otto," said the chief detective. "You wrote those notes that Mr. Fairbanks got. The one you shot into his window and the other you left on his desk. Yes?"

"*Ja, ja!*" admitted the German lad. "I didn't mean no harm to him. I hoped dem fellers iss wrong—dat the trains would not be wrecked."

"All right. But what did you mean about King Canute?" asked Adair curiously.

"*Ja.* Das ist vot they say, dem Germans, like I told it you, Misder. I t'ink as how King Canute iss like Von Hindenburg yet. Vot Von Hindenburg say Germans haf to do. Ain't it?"

"Sure! It 'ain't,'" chuckled Adair. "We'll keep an eye on you, Otto. You seem to know just enough to do something foolish and puzzle the whole crowd," and he waved the boy back to the other side of the cab.

They came in sight of the waiting army train, which had slid nearly to the bottom of the hill. The special had gone on with the remaining deputies, to scatter them along the right-of-way where

the men which should have guarded this stretch of track had been driven off by the mountaineers.

When No. 1001 was coupled on to the troop train and had started once more up the incline, Ralph had time to ask:

"Are the Schwartzchilds and Blums working against the railroad?"

"Old man Schwartzchild and one of the Blums were gathered in by the marshall last evening. It has been a hotbed of treachery up there on High Street. Some of those people will go to the internment camps.

"Otto was afraid to come right out, as you see, and warn the railroad of the threats being made about the troop trains. Besides, he is not altogether right in his upper story, perhaps."

"I should say!" ejaculated Ralph.

"I was down there at the Junction myself last evening and talked with him. After we got the scare out of him he talked intelligently enough. He thinks the world and all of you, Fairbanks. But he did not dare come out flatfooted, even of late, and tell you what he believed the German plotters were bent on doing."

"Well," said Ralph, sighing, as the detective concluded his story, "it won't keep me from being on the watch just the same. You haven't rounded up all the plotters, I imagine, Mr. Adair."

"No, perhaps not. But you'll get this army train through all right, Fairbanks, and the sections behind it. You're doing your part, even if they would not take you in the army."

Ralph only nodded acquiescence with this statement. He did not feel that he could talk about it. He loved his work, and he was glad that he had been enabled to have an active part in getting the troops through safely.

They rolled into Rockton about on the scheduled time that he himself had planned the day before, to be met by a message from the president of the road:

> "Fairbanks, Dispatcher and Engineer. First Sixty-Eight, Rockton:—Good boy! Congratulations! You are coming on. You will be needed on Main when Super comes back. Keep them moving.—GRANT."

So, with this promise of advancement in the near future and the belief that Ralph Fairbanks' hopes will be fulfilled, we shall leave the Young Railroader.

THE END

THE BUNNY BROWN SERIES

By LAURA LEE HOPE

Author of the Popular "Bobbsey Twins" Books

Wrapper and text illustrations drawn by
FLORENCE ENGLAND NOSWORTHY

12mo. BOUND IN CLOTH. ILLUSTRATED. UNIFORM STYLE OF BINDING.

This new series by the author of the "Bobbsey Twins" Books will be eagerly welcomed by the little folks from about five to ten years of age. Their eyes will fairly dance with delight at the lively doings of inquisitive little Bunny Brown and his cunning, trustful sister Sue.

BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE

Bunny was a lively little boy, very inquisitive. When he did anything, Sue followed his leadership. They had many adventures, some comical in the extreme.

BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE ON GRANDPA'S FARM

How the youngsters journeyed to the farm in an auto, and what good times followed, is realistically told.

BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE PLAYING CIRCUS

First the children gave a little affair, but when they obtained an old army tent the show was truly grand.

BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE AT CAMP REST-A-WHILE

The family go into camp on the edge of a beautiful lake, and Bunny and his sister have more good times and some adventures.

BUNNY BROWN AND HIS SISTER SUE AT AUNT LU'S CITY HOME

The city proved a wonderful place to the little folks. They took in all the sights and helped a colored girl who had run away from home.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS SERIES

By VICTOR APPLETON

12mo. BOUND IN CLOTH. ILLUSTRATED. UNIFORM STYLE OF BINDING.

Moving pictures and photo plays are famous the world over, and in this line of books the reader is given a full description of how the films are made—the scenes of little dramas, indoors and out, trick pictures to satisfy the curious, soul-stirring pictures of city affairs, life in the Wild West, among the cowboys and Indians, thrilling rescues along the seacoast, the daring of picture hunters in the jungle among savage beasts, and the great risks run in picturing conditions in a land of earthquakes. The volumes teem with adventures and will be found interesting from first chapter to last.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS
Or Perils of a Great City Depicted.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE WEST
Or Taking Scenes Among the Cowboys and Indians.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS ON THE COAST
Or Showing the Perils of the Deep.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE JUNGLE
Or Stirring Times Among the Wild Animals.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN EARTHQUAKE LAND
Or Working Amid Many Perils.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS AND THE FLOOD
Or Perilous Days on the Mississippi.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS AT PANAMA
Or Stirring Adventures Along the Great Canal.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS UNDER THE SEA
Or The Treasure of the Lost Ship.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS SERIES

By CAPTAIN QUINCY ALLEN

The outdoor chums are four wide-awake lads, sons of wealthy men of a small city located on a lake. The boys love outdoor life, and are greatly interested in hunting, fishing, and picture taking. They have motor cycles, motor boats, canoes, etc., and during their vacations go everywhere and have all sorts of thrilling adventures. The stories give full directions for camping out, how to fish, how to hunt wild animals and prepare the skins for stuffing, how to manage a canoe, how to swim, etc. Full of the spirit of outdoor life.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS
Or The First Tour of the Rod, Gun and Camera Club.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS ON THE LAKE
Or Lively Adventures on Wildcat Island.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS IN THE FOREST
Or Laying the Ghost of Oak Ridge.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS ON THE GULF
Or Rescuing the Lost Balloonists.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS AFTER BIG GAME
Or Perilous Adventures in the Wilderness.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS ON A HOUSEBOAT
Or The Rivals of the Mississippi.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS IN THE BIG WOODS
Or The Rival Hunters at Lumber Run.

THE OUTDOOR CHUMS AT CABIN POINT
Or The Golden Cup Mystery.

12mo. Averaging 240 pages. Illustrated. Handsomely bound in Cloth.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH SERIES

By GRAHAM B. FORBES

Never was there a cleaner, brighter, more manly boy than Frank Allen, the hero of this series of boys' tales, and never was there a better crowd of lads to associate with than the students of the School. All boys will read these stories with deep interest. The rivalry between the towns along the river was of the keenest, and plots and counterplots to win the champions, at baseball, at football, at boat racing, at track athletics, and at ice hockey, were without number. Any lad reading one volume of this series will surely want the others.

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH
Or The All Around Rivals of the School

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE DIAMOND
Or Winning Out by Pluck

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE RIVER
Or The Boat Race Plot that Failed

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE GRIDIRON
Or The Struggle for the Silver Cup

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH ON THE ICE
Or Out for the Hockey Championship

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN TRACK ATHLETICS
Or A Long Run that Won

THE BOYS OF COLUMBIA HIGH IN WINTER SPORTS
Or Stirring Doings on Skates and Iceboats

12mo. Illustrated. Handsomely bound in cloth, with cover design and wrappers in colors.

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK